

## BUGS, BUGS, BUGS, MARCH 2009

Well, with the hot and cold variations we're having, it's hard to tell what all will show up this spring. Several pests have already begun, and several other show potential to be problems. Here is what we are seeing already:

1. Buck moths — The first of the stinging caterpillars are already out in New Orleans and will be out in Baton Rouge shortly and gradually emerge northward. These black, spiny caterpillars can inflict a very painful sting, and to those who are allergic, it can be very serious. You will begin to see the clusters of caterpillars in the oaks. After the first sighting, wait about 2 weeks, and then, if needed, treat with a pyrethroid with a spreader sticker or ultra fine oil. This should manage the present population and have enough residual to catch the remaining caterpillars that hatch late. Although there is only one generation the four to six weeks over which the caterpillars hatch out give the impression of more. The eggs were laid on the branches in the fall. The caterpillars fall from the trees during molting or during high wind. Once on the ground, they will crawl back up the trees or nearby shrubs. It is not necessary to spray for this pest until they are observed in the trees. A good indication of the population density you will have is based on the number of adults observed flying in your area in the fall. If you are unable to treat heavy infestations, contact a local grounds company. Remember, it's cheaper to treat several trees or the neighborhood rather than just the tree in your yard. Figure 1.
2. Eastern tent caterpillar — Those ugly, silky nests in the forks of branches are beginning to show up in many trees around the southern part of the state and will find their way north if they have not already. These foliage-feeding caterpillars have one generation but will be around for the next six to seven weeks. They do not sting and make a good lab specimen for kids to watch the development of a caterpillar. They are found on several trees and will eat a lot of foliage. Management is best done early with pyrethroids and a spreader sticker so better contact is made with the caterpillar and, therefore, quicker management. These caterpillars have a golden-brown color with a yellow stripe down their backs. At maturity the caterpillars are about three inches long. They will pupate in the cracks and crevices on trees, on the eaves of houses and anywhere else that is suitable. The buff-colored moths will emerge about two weeks later. Figure 2.
3. Forest tent caterpillars — After the very dense populations we had the last two years, there appears to be a smaller population this year. Check the live oaks and the sweet gums for populations. These caterpillars do not make the silk nest in the trees but lay down a silk trail on the trees as they move about foraging. They are blue with a series of yellow keyhole-shaped spots down the back. Like their cousins the eastern tent caterpillar, these do not sting and are suitable for classroom use. The moth is similar to its cousin with slight variations in color pattern. Figure 3.
4. Tussock moth — These toothbrush caterpillars are common on live oaks and wax myrtle. They have a bright red head, three tufts of long black setae (two on the head end and one on the rear) and a series of tufts that look like a toothbrush on their backs. Many people believe that they sting, but they do not. The long setae on the bodies will break off and float in the air in heavy populations. These hairs have little hooks and will get into your eyes, nose and throat and cause them to become irritated, hence the idea that you were stung. They, too, can be controlled by pyrethroid and oil. All three of these have few parasites that attack the larva, but are several small wasp parasites attack the pupae. One can observe the pupae

- in cracks and crevices on the trees. Watch the ones with a series of small holes in them. These are the exit holes for the parasites. Figure 4.
5. Varied carpet beetles — With the coming of Easter, we observe the blooming of daisy fleabane. This small, pretty, little flower is in bloom everywhere and is a feeding station for the adults of the varied carpet beetle. They feed on the pollen. Many children like to pick these flowers and bring them inside and shortly thereafter the beetles are found at windows or flying about the house. When your kids or grandkids bring them in, be sure to take the flowers outside and shake them to keep the bugs outdoors. Once inside, they will feed on a number of plant and animal products. Figure 5.
  6. Mites — These little characters, although not insects, are often pests of many plant materials. Their piercing, sucking mouthparts cause the plant foliage to become stippled and yellow- or bronze-looking. They are usually found on the underside of the foliage in massive numbers. In heavy populations, the underside of the foliage can appear white from cast skins and egg shells. These pests are actually arachnids and belong to the spider group. They can be managed with ultra fine oils and a miticide. Be sure when spraying that you observe precautions for your pollinators and treat before bloom or late in the afternoon after the blooms close. Figure 6.
  7. White flies — Populations are developing on citrus and other ornamentals and will probably be on vegetables shortly. Now is the time to manage these populations before they get out of hand and become difficult to control. Check your plants and watch for signs of the development of the white flies. Eggs, nymphs and adults (but not the old pupal skins) are indications of an ongoing infestation. Here again, ultra fine oils can be used with an insecticide to assist in management of the pest. Thorough coverage, proper timing, the right materials and the correct water pH are critical for the management of any pest. Figure 7.
  8. Scales — There are numerous species, and they can infest many host or be extremely specific. They can have one or multiple generations. They can kill the plant, reduce growth, discolor the foliage or cause dieback. They can infest any part of the plant, including the roots. It is not easy to identify which scale it is except by mounting and keying it out. This takes time and requires a good specimen. Sending in a scale sample will greatly assist in the identification and management of these pests. All samples should be sent in alcohol with host, parish, date collected and who collected in case I have questions. Figure 8.