

BEWARE THE AMBROSIA BEETLE

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As though our January freeze was not enough, a beetle is around that is taking advantage of certain frost damaged trees! This beetle, known as the **Asian Ambrosia Beetle**, is a small insect that bores into certain trees, not to eat them, but simply to excavate enough room to produce a brood and grow a special fungus used as food. Let's take a closer look at this curious beetle.

Although the Asian Ambrosia beetle can and does attack seemingly healthy trees, stressed trees seem to be especially susceptible targets. While it is known to attack 124 types of woody plants, this beetle commonly infests mangoes, mahogany, crape myrtles, papayas, peach, sweet gum, magnolia, and even camphor trees. In Charlotte County, I saw several cases of them attacking freeze-damaged Royal Poinciana last year. Just recently this year, I have seen them in freeze-damaged mangoes, mahoganies, Queen's crape myrtles, and moringa trees. The Asian Ambrosia Beetle chews a small 1-2 millimeter hole into the target tree and bores through the vascu-

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lar tissue in the wood. As mentioned earlier, the beetle does not eat the wood, but carries a special fungus that grows in the holes. The boring activity plus the subsequent symbiotic fungus clogging up the water conductive tissue, causes wilting and the possible death of the tree. Diagnostic to this insect is the tube of compressed frass or white sawdust pushed out of the entry hole as it bores inside the tree. These erect, string-like structures are very apparent as they randomly stick out several inches from the trunk and hold together until wind breaks them off or they are touched. Inside the tree, the female beetle lays eggs and feeds here larvae the fungus that grows in the holes.

Once the beetle has bored its way into the stem or trunk and packed the hole with that thin, tell-tale cylinder of sawdust, the beetle is protected inside. Insecticides containing pyrethroids applied to the trunks of trees have been shown to control adult beetles if this pesticide is applied before these insects have a chance to get inside their host trees. Large numbers of beetles can kill a tree, but some trees do recover. Overall, you may consider removing and destroying heavily infested trees. Others can be treated with the recommended insecticide as per label instructions as a preventative and closely watched. Keeping the trees stress-free is important by using good cultural practices such as proper mulching, irrigation and fertilization. A healthy tree is more likely to be able to fend off infestations and/or recover.

I believe that our recent freezing weather may have given these beetles an opportunity to attack. Be on the lookout and act accordingly.

Resources:

- Atkinson, T.H., Foltz, J.L., Wilkinson, R.C. & Mizell, R.F. (2008) Asian Ambrosia Beetle. UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Caldwell, D. (2001) Asian Ambrosia Beetle. Collier County UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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