TWIG GIRDLERS: A TREE NUISANCE

Although Twig Girdlers do not kill trees, they are problematic. These longhorn beetles are found in the Southern U.S., New England, and Arizona. They attack a wide range of trees: hickory, hackberry, oak, dogwood, honey locust, persimmon, walnut and elm. They cause trees to become misshapen because affected branches put out multiple new branches that are often much weaker than they would otherwise be. Tree girdles damage pecan crops, often reducing their yield for one to two years.

Adult Twig Girdlers are active between late August and early October. They mate and begin girdling branches that are between ¼" up to ½" in circumference. Females lay eggs and usually insert them slightly into bark 3-8 at a time on average. However, as

many as 40 egg clusters have been observed. Generally, females choose a leaf scar or spot where a new branch comes out to insert her eggs. It is believed they choose these areas because they are a bit weaker than some other spots such as the center of branches.

Twig Girdlers live for 6-10 weeks. One female twig girdler lays somewhere between 50-200 eggs during her lifetime. Eggs hatch in around 3 weeks. The larvae live through the winter in the dead twig on the tree or on the ground. Once spring comes, larvae grow rapidly. They eat the inner wood leaving the bark intact. At this point larvae move toward the end of the branch and closing it off with shredded wood as they eat and move, they make themselves a pupation chamber that they live in until they emerge as adults. From pupae to adulthood takes about 12-14 days. The adult bores a hole in the wood to get out. Adults are between 1/2" to 5/8" long. They are brownish gray with an ashy gray band around their middle. Twig Girdlers have one generation per year.

Piles of messy twigs beneath trees are a sign of twig girdlers, especially in August and September. There is not an insecticide for them. The best way to protect trees is to rake up and bag the twigs underneath trees. Raking eliminates about 85% of the problem.

Sources:

Oklahoma State Extension.edu
University of Maryland Extension