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From: Spencer Perkins
Camp County Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resources

Pecan Phylloxera

Recently, I've had questions from several homeowners regarding problems with their pecan trees. These problems are the result of an insect called phylloxera. I have seen this pest every year; however, it seems worse this year.

Phylloxera are tiny, soft-bodied insects closely related to aphids. These insects cause conspicuous swellings, called galls, to form on leaves, twigs and nuts. The two most important species attacking pecans are Pecan Leaf Phylloxera and Pecan Phylloxera.

“Integrated pest management” is a philosophy used to design pest control programs. It uses the most compatible and ecologically-sound combination of pest suppression techniques available to sustain profitability and lower risks to the environment and to human health. These management techniques include:

- Cultural control: such as destroying crop residues where some pests overwinter;
- Host plant resistance: selecting pecan varieties that are well adapted and, when available, have genetic resistance to pests;
- Chemical control: using insecticides only when pest densities exceed economically damaging levels and, when available, selecting effective insecticides that have the least impact on natural enemies and non-target organisms; and
- Biological control: recognizing and protecting natural enemies that suppress pest populations.

Sometimes, as homeowners with large trees, it is near impossible to reach the top of the trees with an insecticide or fungicide. Therefore, we are left to accept what Mother Nature gives us and hope for the best. If your trees are small enough to spray for common pests and disease, go to camp.agrilife.org and follow the links to find our “Homeowner’s Guide for Pests of Peaches, Plums, and Pecans.”

In the Homeowner’s Guide, you will see the optimal time to spray for Pecan Phylloxera is in late dormancy with dormant oil. You also can spray at budbreak, just as the buds begin to split and show green color, with malathion 50%EC. But if you are noticing the small galls on your tree this year, it is too late to treat them. However, treat once the tree goes dormant and at budbreak next year since you know you have the pest.

If you have any other questions, feel free to email me at spencer.perkins@ag.tamu.edu or give me a call at the office at 903-856-5005.