

The Twig Girdler

By Marty Morgan, Cooke County Ag Agent

Well I have received lots of calls this fall asking what is going on with my tree? I'm finding small branches and twigs lying on the ground under the tree and looks like they have been cut off. Well your right, they have been cut off, and in a perfect circle at that! Folks have brought twigs and small branches into the office and are amazed that a little beetle can do that circular damage, and with such precision! The clean-cut "V"-shaped groove looks factory cut! Twig Pruners, Hickory Spiral Borer, and Twig Girdler's are three species of small beetles that girdle or bore into tree twigs and branches, causing them to break off and fall to the ground. There are several species such as the one that is common around here called the Pecan Twig Girdler, there is the Mesquite twig girdlers which is common in the Rolling Plains and then the Huisache Girdler, common on the gulf coast. The Pecan Twig Girdlers will also attack citrus, elm, hackberry, hickory, huisache, mimosa, pecan, persimmon, red oak, retama, tepehuaje, Texas ebony, walnut and various fruit trees. Pretty much any tree seems like.

Adults appear and do the damage from late August through October. After mating, females select a host plant, chewing a clean-cut "V"-shaped groove around a branch. Then, they crawl above the girdled site and insert cream-colored oval eggs singly into notches chewed into the bark. Larvae hatch from eggs in about 7 days and begin tunneling underneath the bark. Larvae grow through several stages (instars) through the year before transforming into pupae the following summer. A few of the larvae do not complete development until May or June of the second year, which accounts for a small amount of girdling damage occurring in the spring. Damage appears mainly in late summer and fall when adult beetles are active. Leaves on the girdled branches turn, die and fall, and the branches often fall from the tree during high winds and storms. Beetles are not commonly encountered on trees. They are attracted to lights. The female beetle deposits its eggs in a twig or branch, and they hatch into larvae that feed in the cut part of the branch or twig. The larvae continue to feed and develop in the branch as it hangs in the tree or after it breaks off during a windstorm. Another words larvae feed inside the dead injured tree part and are not a threat to tree health at all. They are not going to kill a tree but they have been known to cause significant damage in pecan orchards and nurseries. Spraying with a chemical insecticide is an option in orchards and nurseries, but not recommended for controlling twig girdlers in a yard situation. Instead, collect and destroy clipped branches which harbor the eggs and larvae, and spray your tree with Horticultural oil during the winter when it is dormant. This will help to destroy any eggs on the tree, which will also help you control other unwanted pests come next spring.

The buggers just create an eyesore and a little labor in cleaning up after them and burning the branches, but mainly they cause you to worry and stress out that something is wrong with your beautiful tree that you will do anything to save. So have no fear, it's just that time of year, -for Twig Girdlers were here!

Twig Pruners: The larvae cut the branch ends smoothly (left)



Twig Girdlers (right): The adults, not the larvae, cut twigs that break and fall to the ground.