

Ball Moss
(*Tillandsia Recuruata*)

Ball moss is an epiphyte, that is, it derives its nutrition from the air. Ball moss causes a great deal of concern and in many cases is felt to be involved in decline of trees. Trees heavily infested with Ball moss have been observed to undergo a slow decline which generally occurs over a three year period. It is suggested that the ball moss is smothering out the lower limbs of the trees, thus weakening them, secondary organisms then enter and eventually kill the trees. Ball moss is spreading in Texas, apparently moving in an eastward direction towards the Louisiana border. Ball moss originally was associated with the counties enclosed within a rectangle formed by drawing a line from Houston to Waco to Del Rio, and then to Victoria. Trees in this area of Texas have been found to be severely infested with this plant. As the young plant grows, it develops hold fasts which attach firmly to the tree. There are no haustoria formed, such as in the case of mistletoe.

The control for the epiphyte was developed by the Extension and Research staff at Texas A&M. It involves the use of a copper fungicide; any product with Copper Hydroxide as the active ingredient. These products have been used with good success for the control of ball moss in result demonstrations. When controlling ball moss, it is important that you cover all of the moss with the spray solution. Trees that are heavily infested with ball moss should be resprayed 12 months later. Applications made in the spring have proven to be much more effective than those made in the fall. It is concluded from observations from result demonstrations that for spray applications to be effective, they must take advantage of the spring rains and the normal uptake of the organisms. The copper is taken into the plant and results in eventual death.

Another method of control is baking soda. It may be purchased in large bags from your local feed store for this purpose. It is applied at the rate of 50 lbs. to 100 gallons of water. Remember to thoroughly saturate the ball moss.

The ball moss will be dead, yet it will hold onto the tree to the hold fasts. It will, in most cases, take around 18 months for these hold fasts to decay sufficiently in order for the ball moss to be blown from the tree. Ball moss, once it has been killed, will become dark gray in color and the "leaf like" structures will point downward rather than be in an upright position.

Ball Moss Control Schedule

1. Treat in early spring (February – April)
2. Use a Copper Hydroxide (4-6 lb./100 gal. of water) or 50 lbs. of Baking Soda/100 gal. of water. Apply at a rate of 1-2 gal. of water per foot of tree height.
3. Retreat any tree with signs of active ball moss after 12 months.

If you have any further questions, please contact the County Extension Office at (830)257-6568.