

Locust Borers in Oregon

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The locust borer, *Megacyllene robiniae* (Foster), is a pest of black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) and its several varieties. This beetle (Figure 1) attacks the trunk and larger branches (more than 2 inches in diameter) of its host tree. The beetle prefers trees that are at least 4 years old, though it less often attacks trees or branches greater than about 6 inches in diameter.



Figure 1.—Adult locust borer. Colors resemble those of a yellowjacket wasp: yellow on black. Note the W-shape pattern on the back, behind the head.

The adult beetle itself causes no harm except to lay eggs that hatch into the wood-boring larvae.

As the larvae develop, they riddle the tree with tunnels (Figure 2). Otherwise healthy trees can survive a fair amount of locust borer damage, although weakened limbs may break in strong winds. Many times, however, locust borers attack trees that already are weakened or dying. Thus, it may seem that the locust borer has killed them.

Beetles fly and lay eggs in early fall (Figure 3). There is only one generation a year. Eggs are laid in cracks in bark along branches and in the main trunk.

Eggs hatch in about a week, and larvae bore immediately into the bark until they reach the relatively thin layer of living phloem tissue. There they feed.

By mid-June of the following year, larvae may have grown to 1 inch in length, while feeding under the bark. At this point, the larvae begin to bore into

the sapwood and heartwood, pushing the boring material (sawdust) out of the tree. This material may accumulate at the base of the tree and can be the first sign that the tree is infested.

Identification

The locust borer beetle is about 3/4 inch long, black with bright yellow stripes and very long antennae (Figure 1). A yellow W-shape pattern extends across the beetle's back. You may find adult beetles visiting golden-rod flowers to feed on pollen. The locust borer can be confused with the painted hickory borer, which looks similar.

Control

Woodpeckers and other birds are important natural enemies of the locust borer.

Chemical control of the locust borer has not been very successful. However, if you attempt to protect individual trees,

it is important to apply insecticides at just the right time. For high-value ornamental trees, spray an insecticide on the trunk and lower limbs when adults are flying but before they lay eggs; that is, apply from mid-August through mid-September (Figure 3).

Sprays must be applied before eggs hatch and larvae are able to bore into trees. Remember that locust borers may not be the primary cause of death for



Figure 2.—Locust limb (split and cross-section) with borer damage.

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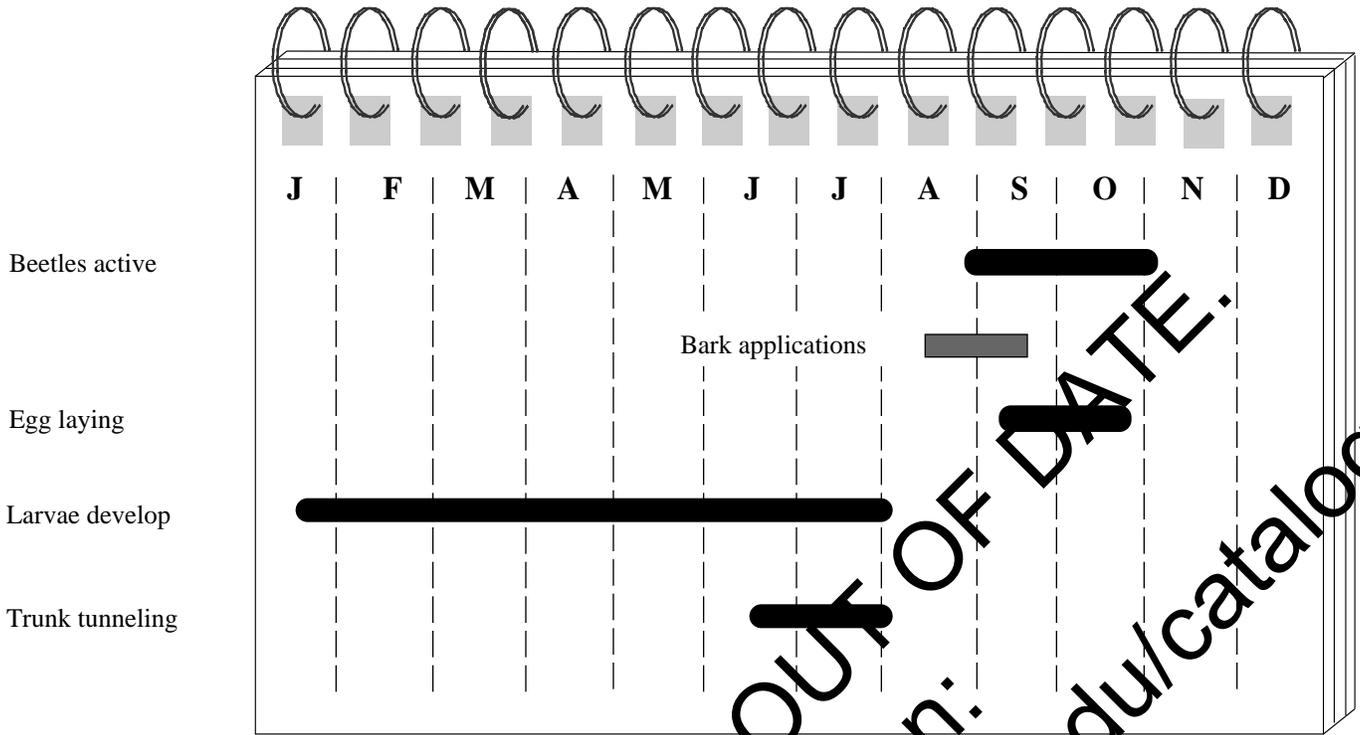


Figure 3.—Life cycle and management of the locust borer (*Megacyllene robiniae*).

otherwise healthy trees. More often, already weakened or diseased trees are overcome. Therefore, it may not pay to treat until you solve the other problems, which could include drought stress, root disease, and other root injuries.

Consult the latest edition of the *PNW Insect Control Handbook* for specific control suggestions using chemicals and other means; these suggestions are listed in the Ornamental Pests section. The Handbook is available from Extension and Experiment Station Communications, Publication Orders, Oregon State

University, 422 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2119.

For additional information, call your county office of the OSU Extension Service, or write to Extension Entomology, Oregon State University, Cordley 2046, Corvallis, OR 97331-2907.

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