June is a Solution Month

The first few days of June are an excellent time to deal with two devastating pests, one affecting homeowners, the other a bane to the farmers of the area.

If you have had a tree affected by bagworms, you know how fast they can destroy an otherwise healthy tree. Bagworms, especially on conifers, are easy to miss until it is too late. They resemble small pine cones and can easily been mistaken as such. Left untreated, they are been devastating to a tree and kill the tree in a matter of a season or two. They build up rapidly and defoliate the tree quickly.

This insect is most easily recognized by the case or bag that the caterpillar forms and suspends from ornamental plants on which it feeds. The bag is made of silk and bits of host foliage. These materials are interwoven to disguise and add strength to the case. When the larva is mature, the bag may be 30 to 50 mm long. Young larvae hatching from the eggs are approximately two mm long, glossy black on the back and dull amber on the undersurface of their bodies. Mature larvae are dull, dirty gray and splotched with darker markings toward the head. Fully developed larvae are about 18 to 25 mm long. The adult female is worm-like. The adult female lacks eyes, wings, functional legs and mouthparts. She never leaves the bag that she constructed as a larva. The adult male is sooty black and moth-like with transparent wings that are nearly devoid of scales

This pest overwinters as eggs inside the female's abdomen inside the bag she constructed. Females lay 500-1000 eggs in each bag during the previous fall. Eggs start hatching from late May through early June. Upon hatching, young larvae crawl out of the bag and start to feed and construct silken shelters over their bodies. As the larvae grow over the eight to ten week feeding period, they continue to enlarge the exterior of their bags with pieces of foliage, bits of bark, or other plant parts. Feeding and development usually continue until August. Mature larvae loop strands of silk around a twig and become firmly attached. After the top of the bag is closed, larvae reverse their position in the bags so that their heads face downward. They then change into the pupal (resting) stage and remain in this life stage for about 4 weeks. During September and early October the males leave their cases and fly to bags containing females where mating takes place. Each mated female deposits a mass of eggs inside her bag. She crawls out of the bag after laying eggs, drops to the ground and dies. This pest species spends the winter inside the bag until the following spring.

The bagworm may be managed on small shrubs and trees by handpicking or cutting the bags from infested plants during late fall, winter, or early spring, before egg hatch. Dispose of the bags so that this pest will not reenter your landscape. When bagworms are too numerous to handpick, an insecticide application may be indicated. Several registered insecticide formulations are labeled for bagworm management. These products should be applied from early to mid-June while the larvae are small.

So if you find that you have an infestation of bagworms, the time to act is NOW. Early June is the perfect time to successfully defeat these rascals. Insecticides with the active ingredient of “Acephate” are the most effective on them. Be careful as you apply this chemical and it is best if you apply to the tree about 5 pm in the evening. This timing will allow the product to dry but also be at full strength as the larvae feed at night.

The farm pest that needs to be eradicated right now is spiny amaranth or spiny pigweed. Spiny amaranth tends to grow most heartily in areas of high cattle concentrations, especially around feeding areas where manure and organic materials build up. Anyone who has herded cattle out of areas where spiny amaranth is prevalent will attest that its name is accurate. It will eat you up!

Spiny amaranth is a summer annual that is very similar in appearance to other pigweed species but has spines along the stems. Control of spiny amaranth is most effective when the plant is less than 2 inches tall and here is where the trouble lies. Spiny amaranth is at or above the two-inch stage right now.

Most people who try to spray it, do so after it has exploded through the grass canopy and at that point it is just too late to do any good whatsoever. Spiny amaranth is a prolific seed producer and chemical applications after it has grown only ensures a nice thick crop next summer.

Treated in the next few days, spiny amaranth is easily controlled using a number of broadleaf herbicides. Products such as 2,4-D, Dura-Cor, Remedy and Cimarron (Ally) work well in killing spiny amaranth; however, the product that meets you needs may depend on what other weed pressures exist and your ability to move animals in or out of the spray area for a week or so.

Spot treatments to areas laid barren by winter hay feeding are effective in both controlling the weed and controlling the cost of treatment in most cases. Lush pastures and reduced cattle concentrations tend to reduce the pressure of spiny amaranth as well.

Upcoming Events

May 30 Deadline to consign VQA calves for July 8 sale

June 10 Evergreen 3rd Annual Good Growth Outreach Program, Scott Waddle Farm 5:30 PM

June 12-14 OGATA Summer Show, 908 Hillman Hwy, Abingdon VA

June 23 Deadline to consign VQA calves to Aug sale

June 24-28 VA 4-H Congress, Blacksburg

July 7-10 Forestry PD for Teachers, Bill Worrell (bworrell@vt.edu)

July 7-11 Smyth County 4-H Camp

July 8 VQA Sale

July 14 VQA Steer Take-Up

July 16 VQA Heifer Take-Up (depending on numbers…. Could be a one-day take-up)

July 21-23 Virginia Beef Cattle University, The Inn, VA Tech Campus

July 29 Youth Day at Rich Valley Fair… stay tuned for more information

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at (276) 783-5175/TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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