



PINE TIP WEEVIL PROBLEM

A Big Garden Problem with a 'No-option' Solution

Have you ever noticed, especially in Park Meadows, but not exclusively anymore, spruce trees turning brown on top and apparently dying from the top down? We have, and many of you have asked us about it.

Identifying the Problem:

The problem is the white pine weevil (*pissodes strobi*), which attacks the leader or terminal shoot of spruce trees from about eight to 30 years old- rarely younger. It is most severe on widely spread trees of approximately the same age, which explains the Park Meadows situation.

The first sign of damage is small, boring holes in the bark on the leaders of healthy trees. Both feeding and laying eggs by the weevil cause holes that exude pitch. Later in the season the tree appears to be dying from the top down.

Life Cycle of the White Pine Weevil:

In late May early June, adult weevils make feeding punctures on the terminal growth of the preceding year. They crawl up the tree on warm days of early spring to feed on wood or buds. Then they mate.

In early June, they lay between 50 to 150 eggs in the terminals. Upon hatching, yellowish grubs group together in bands. The developing larvae girdle and kill the terminals but NOT until the new growth has elongated. It is easy to spot the wilted, bent infested terminals at this time. The needles on the second growth turn reddish and fall also.

The larvae move downward as they mature emerging as adult beetle in late summer where they continue to feed on bed and bark tissue. They overwinter in forest litter, in the ground. Other portions of the "hatch" or brood overwinter as larvae and pupae in the infested terminals. Although there is only one generation per year, there is considerable overlapping of broods.

The Cure:

Cut off the infected tips well into the healthy non-affected area to ensure complete containment of the weevil. It is essential to cut deep enough into the good wood as they may be much deeper than they appear.

The best disposal is to burn the clippings. Park City Fire District has a specific burn permit for residential yard maintenance.

Call them at 649-6706 with any questions.

If you live in an area where burning is prohibited- like within the city limits- or you are cutting during a non-burn period, you enclose the infected branches in a plastic bag with a secure closure. This should suffocate the insects. Plus, once they run out of nutrients they should die.

Prevention:

Sterling Banks from Utah Extension Services recommends spraying spruce tips early May with Dursban, Lindane, or Sevin, all insecticides for boring-type insects. Then, if your spruce begin to die-back in late June and early July, cut the tip out, three to six inches below the infected area and dispose of as advise.

To avoid multiple tops after you have cut the top out of your tree, you need to "train" a new leader. This is accomplished by choosing a strong branch near the center of the tree and affixing it to stake tied off on the main trunk. Make sure it is straight and sturdy, then remove the stake after one growing season.

If everyone checked their trees annually, and disposed of the weevils properly, we could eliminate the situation all together.