

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



**June 3, 2023**

## **Managing Azalea Lacebugs and Bagworms on Landscape Plants**

Protect landscape plants by looking for insect pests on them. By finding the pests early, the damage to the plant is reduced and they are easier to manage. Two of the insect pests to look for are azalea lacebug and bagworm.

An insect that affects azaleas is the azalea lacebug. This insect is about one-eighth inch long with a light brown body. They feed on the underneath side of leaves. The lacy, clear wings of the adults have dark brown to black markings across the wings. The nymphs are black and spiny.

Azalea lacebugs prefer evergreen azalea varieties but attack deciduous varieties and mountain laurel as well. Sap removed by the sucking, piercing mouth parts of the adults and nymphs causes a spotting visible on the upper leaves. In heavy infestations, leaves may be white and drop prematurely. Black spots of their tarry excrement build up on the under sides of the leaves indicating they have been there. The goal is to protect the new green leaves.

Populations of this pest are greatest in mid to late summer as the second generation appears. Adults fly readily and are often gone before symptoms appear. Their injury is light to moderate and widely distributed. In contrast, the immature or nymphal stages are wingless and

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

can move only by walking. Injury builds slowly but can become very intense as the insects mature.

Check for infestations so that treatment can be applied before the plants are disfigured by the pest. Insecticides such as insecticidal soap or summer horticultural oils may be used depending on the plant species or cultivar. Always read product labels carefully. Look for information on phytotoxicity that can occur on sensitive plants or under some environmental conditions such as high temperatures. Repeated treatments may be needed to control this pest effectively. Thorough treatment of the undersides of the leaves is needed for best results.

Bagworms are major pests of needle evergreens such as juniper, arborvitae, cedar, pine, and spruce. Numerous bagworms feeding on these plants can strip the foliage and cause them to die. The key is to continue to check these plants before bagworms have a chance to defoliate them.

By understanding their lifecycle, managing them is easier. Bagworms overwinter as eggs inside the brown bag that contained the female adult. In late May or early June, the eggs hatch. Small, blackish larvae crawl from the bottom of the bag. Larvae cover themselves with pieces of leaves and bark from the plant as protection over their hind part while they feed. They are hard to notice at first until small pieces of branches begin to wiggle. They add on to their bag as they grow making it large enough to withdraw into when disturbed. Bags reach 1.5 to 2 inches long by early September.

Adult males emerge in September. The creamy white, wingless adult females attract the males by releasing a sex-attractant pheromone. When the male finds a female, he mates with her through the bottom of the bag.

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

The fertilized female lays 500 to 1000 eggs, which fills the bag, forcing her to drop from the bag and die. The eggs remain in the bag until they hatch the following May.

Bagworms have a single generation per year.

Hand removal and disposal of bags during the fall through the spring may be enough to minimize the problem if small numbers are present. Remove the bag by clipping it off close to the branch where it is attached. Pulling the bag off strips the needles from the branch.

When numerous small bagworms are attacking evergreens, insecticides are needed to prevent serious damage to the plant. The best time to apply an insecticide is before the bags are a half-inch long. This usually is in late June or early July. If the bag is longer than a half-inch, control with an insecticide is very poor.

The recommended insecticides that are easy to handle and target the larvae only are products containing the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*Bt*). *Bt* is considered a biological control. It is not toxic to birds and beneficial insects. The *Bt* bacteria produces a protein toxin, which disrupts the stomach lining of the larva, so the toxin must be eaten. The insect may not die for several days, but the feeding stops. An important point to remember is that *Bt* is effective on young larvae only. Dipel and Thuricide are two products containing *Bt*, but there are others. Read the label carefully.

Also, insecticides containing pyrethroids as the active ingredient can be used for managing bagworms up to a half-inch in length. Read the label to make sure the product lists the type of plant you want to spray, otherwise, you may injure the plant. In addition, follow the instructions on the label for applying the product.

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

For more information about bagworms and azalea lacebugs, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

## **Annette's Tip:**

At this time of year, southern magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*), which are evergreen, normally drop their older leaves. The older leaves begin to turn yellow and brown and then drop. Some of the fallen leaves have leaf margins with areas that have turned brown and dried out. This is a symptom of winter injury due to winter drying.

## **Ongoing event:**

Owensboro Regional Farmers' Market located at 1205 Triplett Street is open on Tuesday from 8:00 a.m. to noon or sell out, Thursday evening market from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., and from 8:00 a.m. to noon on Saturday.

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