

# Pest Update (February 17-24, 2016)

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Note: samples containing living tissue may only be accepted from South Dakota. Please do not send samples of dying plants or insects from other states. If you live outside of South Dakota and have a question, instead please send a digital picture of the pest or problem. **Walnut samples may not be sent from any location – please provide a picture!**

## Available on the net at:

<http://sdda.sd.gov/conservation-forestry/forest-health/tree-pest-alerts/>

Any treatment recommendations, including those identifying specific pesticides, are for the convenience of the reader. Pesticides mentioned in this publication are generally those that are most commonly available to the public in South Dakota and the inclusion of a product shall not be taken as an endorsement or the exclusion a criticism regarding effectiveness. Please read and follow all label instructions and the label is the final authority for a product's use on a particular pest or plant. Products requiring a commercial pesticide license are occasionally mentioned if there are limited options available. These products will be identified as such but it is the reader's responsibility to determine if they can legally apply any products identified in this publication.

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## Timely topics

The weather is staying warm and it looks like we will have above-normal temperatures for at least the next week or two. While we are all hoping this is the markings of an early spring, we also all know that March could have temperatures in the minus and lots of snow. The fluctuating temperatures are responsible for most of the winter injury that occurs on our woody plants.

## What to do about rabbit damage

As the snow quickly melts away folks are noticing the extent of rabbit damage that occurred on their favorite trees and shrubs. The most common sign is all the 'cocopuffs' on the ground, evidence that the bunnies converted your plants to poop. The woody plants that have experienced the more damage are the traditional favorites of rabbits, apples and crabapples (*Malus*) and spireas (*Spiraea*)



Now is the time to assess the rabbit damage on young fruit trees. A good rule-of-thumb is if the rabbits have chewed more than 2/3's of the bark off around the trunk, remove the tree. If it is less than 1/3 the way around the trunk, the tree will probably recover. If the damage is

between 1/3 and 2/3's of the bark removed around the trunk sometimes the tree survives and sometimes it doesn't. The extent of damage going *around* the trunk is more important than the vertical length as the loss of the bark completely around the trunk at any one point will girdle the tree. The food manufactured by the leaves this spring and summer will not be able to move down to the roots and the 'starved' roots will die within a year. Sometime fruit trees will sprout from below the damage, but the new stem may be originating from the rootstock, not the trunk so the new tree will not have the same fruiting characteristics. It is usually better just to remove the tree and start over. If the damage is less than 1/3 the way around the trunk, just clean away any torn bark. Do not paint the cut as this will not result in healing or reduce wounding. Also remember to prune away any shoots that arise from below the wound as these are from the roots.

Damage on spireas is relatively easy to correct. The rabbits have cut many of the canes to a height of 4 to 8 inches, the snow line when they were feeding. The canes on these damaged shrubs should all be cut to a height of 2- to 3-inches. This means every cane, not just the ones the bunnies chewed off. Pruning the entire shrub to a height of 2 to 3-inches is called rejuvenation pruning



and will result in a uniform and attractive shrub this spring and summer. Shrubs recover quickly from this severe pruning and it is common to find the new canes growing several feet tall during the first growing season. If the damaged canes are not pruned back the shrub will survive, but the growth will not be as uniform and the lower part of the shrub may appear bare. The only drawback to the rabbit damage, whether pruned or now, is that any spring-flowering shrubs, such as some spireas, will not flower this year. Their flower buds form last summer so will be removed with the canes.

The pictures shows where the bunnies nipped at a 45° angle. My finger is where all the repair cuts should be made.

## E-samples



**Sunscald injury to maples.** I received a picture of this sugar maple tree with split bark along the lower trunk. This is a fairly common problem with thin-barked trees such as the Freeman and sugar maples. The problem is more common on the southwest side of the tree (hence the name 'Southwest disease'). The disorder is characterized by bark sloughing off to expose the sapwood. The exact cause of sunscald is not known but is thought to be related to rapid winter temperature changes. This is most common on the southwest side of the trunk as this tissue will warm quickly during sunny winter days, yet the temperature quickly drops to the ambient air temperature once the sun sets. Other stress agents, drought and poorly drained soils may

also play a role. There is not much that can be done to repair this injury other than carefully cut away the damaged bark. The bark should be cut cleanly with a knife and the exposed sapwood left. Do not paint or add commercial wound dressings as these products do not retard decay.

**Topped silver maple.** I also got several pictures of a dying silver maple asking what borers are killing the tree and what can be sprayed. There really is not anything we can spray on people who top trees; that is the real problem.

Topping often results in decay in silver maples, willows and other fast-growing trees. The practice is not a good means of prolonging trees. Once the decay begins to develop in the weakened trees, there are a multitude of borers and other insects that attack. They are not the reason for the decline but are merely taking advantage of the weakened host. Woodpeckers will seek for these insects and the stems often become develop a 'Swiss cheese' pattern of small holes where the borers have emerged and larger holes where the woodpeckers have drilled into the



tree searching for the borer larvae. There is not much that can be done at this point but at long as the tree will not fall and hurt someone, it can be left standing. These trees do provide habitat for wildlife and are referred to as 'high stumps' and in some communities are left to add to the diversity of homes for an assortment of insects, birds and small mammals.

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## Samples received



Davison County **Is this the redheaded ash borer and does it attack hackberry?**

Yes, to both questions. The redheaded ash borer, despite the word ash in its name, will colonize hackberry and several other species. It prefers to attack dying and recently dead trees and is not a threat to health trees. I usually get a sample or two of an adults once we get a slight warm up in the weather as they begin emerging in early spring.

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