

Ag Column

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What is Eating My Evergreen Trees and Shrubs?

The bagworm is a common pest of many evergreen plants in the landscape. The host plants of the bagworm include junipers, arborvitae, cedar, spruce, and pine. If you don't catch these small worms early in the season, control will be very difficult late in the year. Most homeowners notice these bagworms when they are seen hanging on evergreens like Christmas tree ornaments. At this stage, the only option is to pick them off and destroy them. The problem is if you leave only one, there will be enough eggs to reinfest the plant next year.

If you've had these pests before, your best defense is to inspect your plants in mid-May. You want to look for the immature bagworms crawling and feeding on your landscape plants.

They are controlled easily early in the season before they have the protection of their bag. The bagworm builds its bag from pieces of material from the plant upon which it is feeding. The worm drags the bag wherever it goes, retreating into the bag when disturbed. As the bag becomes well developed, the worm is very well protected from insecticides, making control difficult. Feeding continues until August when the female prepares for mating and winter. After mating, the female drops to the ground and dies. The eggs overwinter in the bag until they hatch in early to mid May. Fortunately, there is only one generation per year.

If insecticides are used, they must be applied when bagworms are small and without the protection of their bag. Make sure you read the label to insure that your plant of concern is listed. The rate of application may vary depending on the plant. Recommended insecticides include carbaryl, Bt, malathion, acephate, trichlorfon, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, spinosad, and lambda-cyhalothrin. These are the active ingredients in each of the insecticides.

The bagworm also has natural enemies that feed on the larvae and eggs helping to keep it under control.

Remember insecticides only work when sprayed on juvenile larvae before they get their bag formed. If you miss this opportunity for control, I would recommend handpicking and destroying all of the bagworms to prevent further damage. This will be impossible due to plant size for some mature plants.