

Tree Pest Alert: Ash Bark Beetle

Parks has identified the Ash Bark Beetle in Red Deer. This insect pest harms all varieties of ash trees except Mountain Ash, starting its attacks on the younger, external branches of the tree and working its way in to the trunk. Please read on for information on how to deal with this pest.

Ash Bark Beetle

Hosts and damage

This insect attacks all ash trees except Mountain Ash, tunneling between the bark and wood. This burrowing girdles branches, causing the leaves to be smaller than normal, and to wilt and turn yellow between late June and early August.

The beetles usually attack dying or weakened branches, however, during periods of drought or other stress, beetle populations may reach outbreak proportions. As the attacks advance, branch dieback may continue to the point where beetles also attack and girdle the trunk, resulting in tree death.

Physical characteristics

The adult beetles are very small and oval, about 2-3 mm (1/8 inch) long. They are difficult to see; they may vary in colour from grey to light reddish-brown to dark brown. The larvae inside the tree are tiny white, C-shaped grubs with a brown head. Feeding damage is the best way to identify this pest.

Biology

The ash bark beetle overwinters as an adult in the bark at the base of living ash trees. In late May and early June, adults emerge and move to small branches of stressed ash trees to seek egg-laying sites. Females tunnel into the sapwood to deposit eggs in galleries that encircle the branch. Egg galleries can be identified by a row of ventilation holes in the bark about 1 mm in diameter and 5 mm apart. The area around the egg gallery is discoloured and sunken, especially late in the growing season. After hatching, the larvae tunnel away from the main gallery toward branch tips or ends of branches. New adults emerge and feed before seeking hibernation sites in September and October.

Why should you manage this pest?

A healthy ash can tolerate some damage from this insect. However, repeated attacks can weaken and even kill trees. Management of the beetle will help to control its spread to other properties.



L to R: severely stunted, somewhat stunted and healthy ash leaves



Girdling caused by the Ash Bark Beetle

Control procedures

Regular, proper pruning of dead or weakened branches will remove potential beetle breeding sites. After pruning, destroy dead, weakened or infested branches by burying or burning them before bark beetles adult emerge in July.

Consider removing stunted and severely affected ash trees, as they may spread infestations to healthy trees.