Those Bad Bugs for Pecans

There are several “Bad Bugs” in our area; one “old pest” and three new concerns that may be effecting pecan trees. Since I treasure my pecan tree as my best landscape asset, the information shared below is to raise awareness of these pests and their resulting damage. While the bugs themselves may not be easy to spot, they leave tell tale signs of their presence:

The **Pecan Nut Casebearer** is one of the most important pests of pecans. It inhabits most pecan growing regions of Texas and Southeastern New Mexico. Capable of producing three generations per year, these bugs can do major destruction to a tree’s crop. The casebearer larvae tunnel into nutlets shortly after they are pollinated and generally destroy all the nutlets in a cluster.

The gray to almost black moth is about 1/3 inch long with a ridge of dark scales followed by a band of lighter scales across the wings. The female does major damage in her 5-8 days of life leaving 50 - 150 eggs on the pecan nutlets which are just forming soon after their pollination. Eggs hatch in 4 to 5 days and the larva begin to feed on the buds before entering the nut. Full grown larvae enter the pupal stage inside the nut. The moth emerges 9—14 days later.

With the host pecan nutlets destroyed, silk and black frass are often visible outside infected nuts. The first generation does the most destruction but the attack continues throughout the season.

Native to Eastern and Midwestern US, the **Pecan Weevil** is an extremely serious pest of pecans. Worse yet, it has been introduced several times to New Mexico, most recently found in Artesia (2010) and Lovington (2012). Supervised eradication is necessary for a six year period with followup scrutiny required; the effected Lovington trees are in this process now.

Most likely, the weevil will never be seen as it stays hidden in the pecan tree canopy, however, the visible damage is marked by what looks like a hole the size of a bb or 1/8 drill bit on the mature pecan shell. The crows and other birds that “share” our pecans often leave jagged holes in the nut case; the weevil’s holes will be small and very precisely smooth.

**Your help is requested. If you find any nuts marked by the tell-tale holes, please immediately contact your local Extension Service Office.**

And then we have those nasty **Stink Bugs**. Some stink bugs and leaf footed bugs come in from the by-ways, weeds, and fields, especially during our drought, to feed on pecans. They suck the sap from developing pecans to leave black spots on the developed kernel and a horrible bitter taste.

Another reason not like stink bugs.

Finally, a pest common in the eastern states, the **Hickory Shuckworm** has moved into Texas and likes pecan trees. It may be visiting New Mexico. Shuckworm larvae tunnel into the shuck, disrupting the flow of nutrients and water to the developing nut. This results are poor nut quality and late maturity. These larvae just stay in the husks and don’t enter the nut but the damaged husks stick to the nuts and the “sticktights” reduce the harvest.

Removing and destroying sticktights and husks, where the larvae can overwinter, can reduce infestations.

While I compost and recycle much of my yard waste, after considering these pests, I am using prevention, in the form of a good cleaning around my pecan tree, especially of sticktights, may be “worth a pound of cure”.

~~Shirley Mee