

NEWS FOR THE RESIDENTS OF CANYON CREEK

Canyon Creek CHRONICLE

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CARPENTER ANTS

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



Carpenter ants nest outdoors in dead wood (tree stumps or dead limbs, fences, firewood, etc.). They may also be found in wood siding, beams, joists, fascia boards or trim on structures. Damage is usually limited since carpenter ants tunnel and nest within wood; they do not eat wood. However, wood can become weakened by carpenter ant excavation.

Carpenter ants are large ants that can vary in color from all black to reddish to yellowish or a combination of colors. These ants have one node, no stinger and a circle of hairs at the tip of their abdomen.

Galleries in the nest are excavated following the grain of the wood and have clean, smooth walls. Nest locations may be discovered by searching for piles of sawdust-looking material under exit holes. Sawdust is coarse and may also contain soil or sand, uneaten insects as well as dead ants from the colony.

Carpenter ants are able to enter homes from tree branches or utility lines touching the home, through cracks and crevices around windows and doors, cracks in foundation walls, ventilation openings or heating and air conditioning ducts.

Here are some tips for a carpenter ant infestation:

- Remove dead trees and/ or limbs and remove tree stumps from the landscape. Many times you can remove the (possible) nesting sites and get rid of the ants without using pesticides.
- Prune trees and shrubs that touch the home. Carpenter ants will often use these areas as a bridge to enter the home.
- Replace wood that is water damaged. Carpenter ants are drawn to moisture damaged wood, so make sure to repair any water leaks and replace damaged wood.

• Remove wood debris and firewood that is near the home. Carpenter ants may nest in firewood and when it is stacked right next to the home, it allows the ants to enter more easily.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600.

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PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN

Paul is a sweet, loving boy—and he almost always has a smile on face! While he is extremely active and loves to play sports and be outside, Paul does well academically and is a polite young man.

Paul is 7 years old and is confident in his abilities to entertain others with his dance moves, creativity, and jokes. An abundance of support and patience will help Paul achieve success in his promising young life.

To find out more about Paul, please contact Grace Lindgren, LMSW, Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiter, at (512) 810-0813 or g lindgren@helpinghandhome.org.

Adopting a child from the foster care system requires little or no cost to the adoptive family and funding may be available to help the adoptive family support the child or sibling group.

The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is a program of Partnerships for Children. To learn more about the adoption or fostering process, please call the Heart Gallery of Central Texas at (512) 834-3102, email heartgallery@partnershipsforchildren.org or visit our website at www.partnershipsforchildren.org.

Pruning Guidelines for Prevention of Oak Wilt in Texas

NOW IS THE TIME TO PRUNE YOUR OAK TREES

Oak wilt, caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum*, is the most destructive disease affecting live oaks and red oaks in Central Texas. Most of the tree mortality results from tree-to-tree spread of the pathogen through interconnected or grafted root systems, once an oak wilt center becomes established. New infection centers begin when beetles carry oak wilt fungal spores from infected red oaks to fresh, open wounds on healthy oaks. Wounds include any damage caused by wind, hail, vehicles, construction, squirrels, birds or pruning. Research has shown that both oak wilt fungal mats on infected red oaks and insects that carry oak wilt spores are most prevalent in the spring. Below is a brief description of how you can reduce the risk of fungal spread when pruning.

- Always paint fresh wounds on oaks, including pruning cuts and stumps, with wound dressing or latex paint immediately after pruning or live tree removal at all times of the year.
- Clean all pruning tools with 10% bleach solution or Lysol™ between sites and/or trees.
- If possible avoid pruning or wounding of oaks during the spring (currently defined as February 1 through June 30). Reasons to prune in the spring include:

- To accommodate public safety concerns such as hazardous limbs, traffic visibility or emergency utility line clearance.
- To repair damaged limbs (from storms or other anomalies)
- To remove limbs rubbing on a building or rubbing on other branches, and to raise low limbs over a street.
- On sites where construction schedules take precedence, pruning any live tissue should only be done to accommodate required clearance.
- Dead branch removal where live tissue is not exposed.

Pruning for other reasons (general tree health, non-safety related clearance or thinning, etc.) should be conducted before February 1 or after June 30. Debris from diseased red oaks should be immediately chipped, burned or buried. Regardless of the reasons or time of year, proper pruning techniques should be used. These techniques include making proper pruning cuts and avoiding injurious practices such as topping or excessive crown thinning. If you are uncertain about any of this information, you should consult with a Texas Oak Wilt Certified arborist, ISA Certified Arborist, or an oak wilt specialist from a city, county or state government agency such as the Texas Forest Service or Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

References available at <http://www.TexasOakWilt.org>.

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NATUREWATCH

by Jim and Lynne Weber

WHAT GALL!

In nature, galls refer not to brazen behavior but to abnormal outgrowths on the surface of certain life forms. Plant galls, or cecidia, can be caused by various parasites from fungi to bacteria as well as by insects and mites. In the United States there are over 2000 species of gall-inducing insects, and the majority are reported to form galls on oak trees.

The formation of a gall begins with the hatching of the eggs of certain wasp species laid on the plant. It progresses when the larvae (or the adult female) injects chemicals into the plant, and the tissue swells in reaction, forming a spherical microhabitat around the larvae. The gall's purpose is twofold, providing the larvae with nutrients and protecting them from predators. Once fully grown, the all-female, adult insects bore an exit hole out to the surface of the gall and disperse.

While usually forming in the spring when the most rapid plant cell division occurs, galls initially appear light green in color but become even more noticeable in the fall when oak trees drop their leaves. Dull, dry, and brown, the spent galls are often scavenged by mammals searching for leftover food as winter approaches.

Gall-inducing insects are usually species-specific and sometimes even tissue-specific (branches, leaves, buds, roots) in the plants they select. In central Texas, most of the gall-inducing insects are gall wasps, and while they are closely associated with several species of our native oaks, they can also be identified by the types of galls they produce.

In general, you may find leaf galls with orangish 'hair' formed by the Hedgehog gall wasp, and sticky, spongy galls on twigs with seed-like structures inside formed by the Wool sower gall wasp. On live oaks, you can find woody twig and stem galls formed by the Mealy oak gall wasp, and leaf galls formed by the Woolly leaf gall wasp. The oak apple wasp, however, prefers our red oaks and forms spherical, spongy-filled galls.

Gall-making insects are generally not considered pests, and some galls are even considered attractive and are used in flower arrangements and other crafts. While certain species may cause some aesthetic damage to a plant such as leaf discoloration or early defoliation, most of these insects do not permanently damage the host plant, but just use them to further their own purpose. What gall!

Send your nature-related questions to naturewatch@austin.rr.com and we'll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our blog at:

naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com



Hedgehog gall on white oak (photo by J. Hahn)



Hedgehog gall on white oak (photo by J. Hahn)



Hedgehog gall on white oak (photo by J. Hahn)

- Kids Stuff -



What does it mean to be green? "Green" is more than just a color. It also means taking special steps to protect the environment — the water, the land, and the air we breathe. Why green? Plants are green, and without them the Earth wouldn't be such a lovely home for us human beings. Every day, people make choices that affect the amount of trash and pollution that gets produced in our world. What can you do? A whole lot, actually. Here's a four-step guide to being green:

- Reduce the amount of stuff you use and throw away.
- Reuse stuff when you can.
- Recycle cans, bottles, paper, books, and even toys.
- Enjoy the Earth — walk in the woods, plant a tree, and eat some of the delicious food it produces.

REDUCE IT!

When you use less of something, you do a good thing for the Earth. For instance, a shorter shower means you used less water and less fuel since your house uses fuel to run the water heater that warmed up the water. Here's a list of other stuff you can reduce:

- Turn off lights you're not using. Better yet, encourage your parents to switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs. They last longer and use less energy. They do need to be disposed of properly, though, so make sure your mom or dad helps if one breaks.
- Turn off the water when you're brushing your teeth.
- When you can, walk or ride your bike instead of driving in the car. You'll use less gas — and get some exercise!
- Unplug the chargers for your phone and MP3 player when you're not using them.
- Put your computer to "sleep" instead of leaving it on with the screensaver running.

REUSE IT!

Sometimes people call ours a "throwaway society." That means that we're a little too willing to throw away old stuff and buy new stuff. Many times, even if you no longer need something, someone else just might. For instance, if your baby brother outgrows his plastic basketball hoop, why not give it to another family who has a little kid? That's one less plastic basketball set that they need to buy. It's also one less large plastic toy that needs to be produced, packaged, and shipped to the toy store. Here are some additional ways to reuse the stuff you have:

- Use rechargeable batteries for your handheld computer games, MP3 players, cell phones, and digital cameras.
- Choose reusable travel cups instead of disposable paper or plastic cups.
- Take your own bags — preferably reusable ones — when you go to the grocery store.

- Drink tap water instead of buying bottled water. If you don't like how your tap water tastes, a low-cost filtration system could make a difference. Get a reusable water bottle so you can take it with you.
- Organize a swap among your friends. What can you swap? Books, toys, even clothes. It's a way for everyone to get something new without spending any money and without throwing a bunch of stuff away. Set aside some items for your swap when you're cleaning your room!
- Take paper from your computer printouts and use the other side for more computer printing or just to draw or doodle on.

RECYCLE IT!

Recycling has never been easier. Many communities will pick it up right in front of your house and some towns even require it. Tell your mom or dad you want to become "Chief of Recycling" for your household. That means you'll organize the recyclable items in bins, remember to put them on the curb on recycling day, and help remind others which items can be rinsed and recycled.

By separating plastic bottles, cans, bottles, and more, you're reducing the amount of trash that goes to the landfill. What's a landfill? A big mountain of trash, where all the trash trucks go to dump their loads. Recycled goods go instead to a recycling center, where they can be crushed, broken down, and later turned into new cans, bottles, and paper.

What else can be recycled? Sometimes water can be. For instance, some communities take used water — like from the washing machine and shower — and clean it up so it's safe to use for watering the grass and flowers.

ENJOY IT!

It's true that trash and pollution are problems, but the Earth remains a huge and glorious place that's ready for you to explore. You can start locally by visiting the naturally beautiful spots in your city and state. Go for a hike, visit local nature centers and gardens, climb up mountains, and explore lazy creeks.

Experience the outdoors in all sorts of weather — from a sunny day at the beach or lake to a wintry adventure when it snows. And if you're planning a family vacation, suggest a trip to a national treasure, such as the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, or Chincoteague Island to roam with the wild ponies.

But before you travel the globe, take a look at your own backyard. Is there a spot where you could plant a tree or put in a little fruit or vegetable garden? If so, get out there and get your hands dirty. Then you can watch with pride as your tree takes root and your garden plants grow from sprigs to big plants full of ripe, red tomatoes or tiny, succulent blueberries. Who knew being green would taste so good?

*Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD
Date reviewed: September 2013*

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