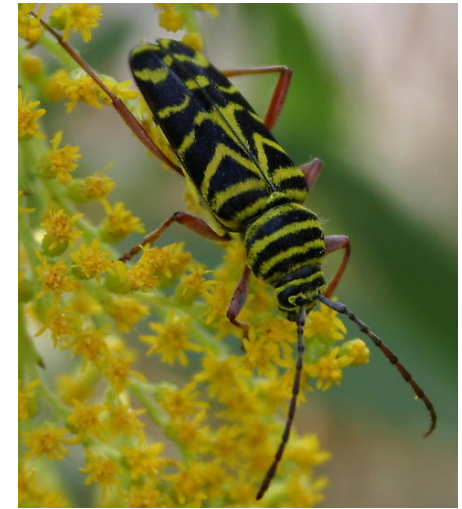


Take Action against the Locust Borer



Locust borer adult beetle
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The locust borer has been very busy infesting many locust trees in the north central Idaho area. Damage is most noticeable after a windstorm.

The black locust tree, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, is very prevalent in the Lewis Clark Valley. Its relationship with the locust borer dates back in time before Lewis and Clark, being first reported in 1702. With this prevalence is the existence of the locust borer, *Megacyllene robiniae*.

The locust borer is in the family of longhorned beetles. The adult has long antennae and a hard covering over its wings, which are parallel with its body, and is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long. It looks somewhat like a yellowjacket, with yellow stripes forming a “W” just behind the head.

The adults do not feed, they just reproduce. Eggs are laid in late September, when the females deposit 100-200 small, white oval eggs singly or in groups of six to 8 in bark crevices and around wounds on the locust tree trunk. The eggs hatch in 5 to 8 days and the small white grubs bore into the inner bark where they overwinter as first instar larvae.

Larvae begin feeding around the time of bud swell in the spring. Early in the season, borer activity produces wet spots on the bark during the bud break period.

In mid to late summer, the borer larvae are tunneling into a tree’s branches and trunk, weakening the tree and making it prone to wind damage. You may see sawdust at the base of severely infested trees. Many dead and broken limbs may be present, and may include sprout growth and swellings on the trunk. White dust may be visible on the bark. The dust is pushed out of the tree by the developing larvae feeding on the sapwood.

Low vigor trees, damaged trees, and trees under environmental, drought or nutritional stress are most likely to be infested. Small trees less than six inches in diameter are most likely to be attacked, while larger trees are safe from attacks. Avoid tree stress by focusing on plant health through proper watering fertilization and culture.

Full grown larvae will eventually get to 1 inch long and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide, soft-bodied and distinctly segmented. They have a white, cylindrical body that is finely hairy and a reddish brown head. As the larvae grow, they frequently return to the surface of the bark and enlarge their tunnels. Most larvae reach full-size between mid-July and mid-August and pupate in their tunnels. There is one generation per year.

The thornless honeylocust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*, is not affected.



Borer damage on locust tree limb.

Control measures are limited

Since insecticides are generally not effective against locust borer, prevention is of the utmost importance.

Proper irrigation of trees is essential – they should be watered to a depth of two feet once a month during hot weather. Irrigating turf adjacent to trees is not enough. Avoid compaction and paving around trees, as this stresses them further. Be sure to control minor pests such as aphids. As always, avoid topping trees and other improper pruning practices. Avoid the use of weed and feed lawn fertilizers adjacent to trees. Locust trees grow readily on poor sites, but they may be stressed due to drought conditions.

If you do want to protect individual trees with insecticides, it is very important to apply them at the right time, which is as the adults are flying, but before they lay eggs. Once the borers hatch and enter trees, there is no insecticide that can be used for control.

Apply the insecticide to the trunk and lower limbs from mid-August to mid-September. Currently, carbaryl (Sevin) is the only insecticide labeled for control of locust borer. Always use pesticides according to label directions. Horticultural (dormant) oils can be used in spring on the bark to smother eggs before they hatch.

If trees are heavily infested, remove them and the wood from the area.