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Hold off on any ash tree treatments for now

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Emerald ash borer (EAB) is very likely the next insect to cause community landscape trees to die. This borer has been in the news long enough tree owners are asking if they should be treating ash trees.

Emerald ash borer has not yet been found in Nebraska. It was most recently confirmed 80 miles east of Plattsmouth in Iowa. It was confirmed in Boulder, Colo., last September. These news reports may tempt homeowners to treat valuable ash trees.

However, the recommendation of the Nebraska Forest Service and UNL Extension is to wait to begin treatment until emerald ash borer is known to be within 15 miles of a tree.

According to the Nebraska Forest Service, treating trees beyond 15 miles will likely provide little or no benefit to the tree but will result in unnecessary environmental exposure to pesticides.

If you have an ash tree, be aware state and federal agencies are monitoring EAB infestations and will provide updates when it is found in Nebraska.

Information about EAB and about when and how to treat ash trees can be monitored on the

Nebraska Forest Service website. Visit www.nfs.unl.edu/EAB.asp.

After I tell people the recommendation is to wait, I'm often asked what if EAB is in Nebraska but hasn't yet been found. It can take up to five years for this borer to kill a tree, so once found it is true it has likely been in a state for at least a few years.

However, unlike pine wilt killing Scotch pine where the tree must be treated prior to the nematode infesting the tree, ash trees that are already infested with EAB are still treatable and can be saved if the damage is not too severe.

Instead of making pesticide applications likely to be of little benefit, become more informed to help make decisions about EAB. If you have an ash tree, decide if you are willing to treat the tree on an annual basis or if you will replace the tree.

Valuable trees, such as those providing shade for a home and are in good condition, may be worth the cost of annual treatment. Now is the time to become familiar with treatment options and check into cost. The Nebraska Forest Service has a guide that lists current options.

At that same time, be aware some communities could make it mandatory that infested ash trees be removed. This has occurred in other states where EAB has killed large numbers of ash trees.

Trees with health or structural issues or those not planted in key locations, may best be replaced rather than treated annually. For example, if a tree has branch dieback, sparse foliage, conks (mushrooms) on the trunk or branches, or severe trunk injuries, it is probably not worth the expense of treating.

If you are planting a new tree this spring, avoid ash trees. Most types of ash are susceptible to EAB. If you know you will not treat an ash tree once it is infested, do you have space on your property to plant another tree now to take over the landscape function if the ash tree dies?

When Dutch elm disease killed American Elms, many of these trees were replaced with green ash. This created another monoculture susceptible to pests. We could now lose a large percentage of these trees. Let's not make the same mistake twice. Select trees for diversity.

A few readily available large trees to plant are honeylocust, American linden, Norway maple, Miyabe maple, hybrid elms and white oak. If you wish to think (plant) outside the box, consider Kentucky coffeetree, shagbark and bitternut hickory, silver linden and horse chestnut.

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