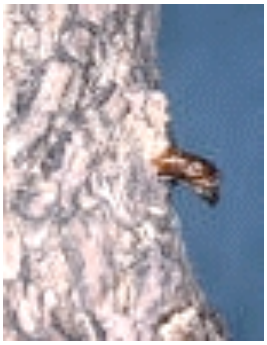
LILAC PESTS

(Lilacs are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including Copper Underwing, Scalloped Oak and Svensson's Copper Underwing.)

LILAC BORER



The lilac borer is one of the hardest insects to catch. They usually make their way into the plant at its base through old wounds. The borer makes its way into the cane, eating the cambium wood, which is the wood that lets sap flow. As the wood gets eaten around the branch of the old trunk, the specific branch becomes weaker, leaves begin to yellow and the branch will die. The only visible external signs is frass (sawdust-like castings) at the base of the plant and an entry hole at the trunk. You may first notice frass clinging to twigs or lying in tiny mounds on the ground near the stem. Look for tiny holes up and down the main stalk or cane. Use a pliable wire to probe the tunnels, then apply a few drops of Malathion into the hole and seal with glazing compound or a cud of chewing gum.

The best way to control this is to cut the weakened branch and destroy the larva. Left undiscovered, very late the following May, it emerges as a wasp-like adult leaving the casting of its pupa, the winter coat, hanging near the hole. The adult borer waspy-looking moths are out and mating, ready to lay their eggs, and it is at this time you must spray immediately. Current environmental standards may not allow chemicals previously used to treat this problem. Most lilacs can withstand a few lilac borers but when they increase in number, something had better be done to control them. One of the very best controls which avoids chemicals or killing of the wasp is the pheromone attractant trap. It not only traps lilac borers but also several other kinds, greatly reducing mating success and eliminating the need for strong chemicals.

JAPANESE BEETLE

This beetle is fortunately not usually interested in lilacs but in heavy infestations is likely to turn upon them and cause some moderate damage to young shoots and leaves. The beetle skeletonizes the leaves by devouring all the leaf tissue possible and where extremely tender, the whole shoot. It is a scarab-like beetle ½ to ¾" long. Its hard wing-covers and head are a lustrous greenish-copper color. In severe infestations it can quickly divest a whole plant of its leaves. Not only do the adult beetles do considerable leaf damage but their larval grubs live on in the soil doing considerable damage to both grass and plant roots. The larvae are plump, white grubs that if not poisoned in the soil soon lead to an infestation of garden moles which feed upon the underground grubs. Special sprays for the beetle have been developed and are readily available under several names but a most effective control measure is the beetle trap using a sex pheromone attractant. There is a small parasite that lives on the larvae in spore form that has some possibility for killing the grubs but one cannot count on its effectiveness as total control. In garden stores it is known as Dylox or Dasanit (granules).

RODENTS AND DEER

Rodents usually go after lilacs when they are young. This can be avoided with some wrapping of the trunk with tree wraps sold at garden centers. Lilac buds are a food source for deer and they will eat almost anything when food is scarce. Motion detector lights can sometimes deter deer at night, but they have to be moved on a regular basis or the deer will get used to the location. Another method is to hang strands of human hair in the lilacs. This apparently puts out our odor which discourages deer to come around.

CICADA

Cicadas affect lilac bushes much the same as all other shrubs: not much in some cases, severe in others. They do not damage older wood or bark because it is too hard and rough for their egg-laying process. Rather, females find tender one or two year old branchlets of particular shrubs, lilacs included, yet interestingly, cicadas do not *prefer* lilacs. The razor-like slits in which she lays her eggs weaken the branch so that it may have browned, died, fallen off and blown away last summer. So, two-fold damage may only be apparent the following spring: first, in the form of the plant being disfigured by broken off, not neatly pruned, branches. Secondly, by the loss of the feeding roots. Rarely is a lilac damaged so from cicadas that it dies, but because the egg-laying damage takes place in late summer, it will have been too late for the plant to renew growth. So, spring buds may be far fewer than normal in the year following the cicadas' periodic emergence. This is likely to be the entire extent of cicada damage and may or may not be very visible.

OTHER

FROST DAMAGE

If leaves become damaged by frost they will begin to blacken. The best thing to do is to prune out to six inches below the frost as quickly as possible. This will permit the secondary buds below bark level to become stimulated and grow. You will lose the bloom for that year but at least the plant will reshoot. It would be good also to sterilize the pruners in 70% rubbing alcohol between each cut.

WITCHES BROOM

This is a viral disease which appears mostly on late flowering lilacs where the growth is congested or dwarfed. It usually does not happen in homeowners' gardens but mostly in large collections. The disease is best controlled by eliminating the affected canes, but when pruning these plants it is important to disinfect the shears before cutting other plants.

DEFORMED LEAVES

This is usually the result of nutrient deficiency or caused by pollutants. Seek advice from the County Agricultural Agent.

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