

Early Blooms, Early Spring Pests

Spring is already here as you've certainly noticed. Here in Lexington, magnolias and Bradford pears (among others) are currently in full bloom, making them at least a couple weeks ahead of schedule. Crabapples are even further ahead of schedule.

With the early blooms, come early insects. "Phenological events" such as plant blooming and insect emergences follow a predictable (but certainly not rigid) pattern. Various factors can cause these phenological events to vary in their order from one year to the next. For example, insects that overwinter underground typically experience less temperature fluctuation than those that overwinter aboveground, and these temperature differences affect the insects' developmental rates.

Are there any pests that you've already started seeing? Please feel free to share this with the group or contact me directly—I would be interested to know.

Included below are some early-spring pests to be aware of.

Gall-forming mites on maple

Feeding by **maple bladder gall mite**, a type of eriophyid mite, leads to **wort-like galls** on the upper leaf surfaces of **silver and red maples**. These galls cause minimal damage to the health of established trees. However the reduced aesthetic quality can make this mite a pest in nurseries and some landscapes.

Some cultivars, particularly those with strong red or yellow fall color appear to have some resistance to this pest.

Maple bladder gall mite overwinters under loose bark and around callused areas. **In the spring, mites migrate to leaf buds**. Their feeding on buds and newly expanding leaves causes the formation of galls that house the mite pest.

For problematic cultivars, preventive pesticide applications can be made **when the new leaf buds are opening**. However, the window of opportunity is short; once the gall is formed, pesticide applications are ineffective.

Other methods of control include selection of resistant cultivars and dormant oil applied to the trunk during dormancy.

Another related eriophyid mite causes **maple spindle gall** on sugar maple. The biology and management of these two galls are similar. For more information, see this [Fact Sheet](#) from The Ohio State University Extension Service.



Galls formed by maple bladder gall mite

Photo: Joseph O'Brien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Galls of maple spindle gall mite

Photo: lilysecret42

Spruce Spider Mite

Spruce spider mite is active in the **cooler seasons** of early spring and late fall. It can become active in March and reach damaging levels by April and May.

The host range for spruce spider mite is much broader than its name suggests, including more than **40 species of conifers**. Some of the most common hosts include spruce (especially Alberta spruce), pine, juniper, fir, arborvitae, hemlock, taxus and false cypress.

Feeding damage first appears as **tiny white speckles on the needles**, but continued feeding can lead to yellowing, browning, and premature needle drop, often beginning in the interior canopy. Other signs of an infestation include **webbing, eggs and cast skins**.

Unfortunately, the reduced health of the plant is often **left unnoticed** until the hot dry weather in mid-summer. Heavy infestations of spruce spider mite can cause branch dieback and even death of the plant.



Spruce spider mite eggs

Photo: USDA Forest Service—Region 4 Intermountain Archive, Bugwood.org



Spruce spider mite adults and shed skins (white). Coloration of adults can vary.

Photo: Petr Kapitola, State Phytosanitary Administration, Bugwood.org

Southern Red Mite

Southern red mite is another species of spider mite to watch out for this time of year. Like spruce spider mite, it **also tends to be active** in the cool seasons of **early spring** and late fall.

This mite is a relatively common pest of **broad-leaved evergreens** including Japanese and American hollies, viburnum, and rhododendron.

Damage appears as **stippling**, browning, premature leaf drop, and occasional leaf distortion.



Webbing from spruce spider mite infestation

Photo: Ward Strong, BC Ministry of Forests, Bugwood.org



White pine aphids tended by ants

Photo: E. Bradford Walker, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Bugwood.org

White pine aphid

Numerous aphid species are spring pests, but white pine aphid is active particularly early in the season. As the name implies, this aphid feeds on **white pine**.

Like other aphids, white pine aphid damages its host by piercing the plant with straw-like mouthparts and feeding on plant sap.

Aphids excrete sugary **honey-dew** that can also lead to the growth of unattractive black sooty mold.

Beginning in the early spring, examine young **terminal foliage** for clusters of **black aphids**. If you notice **ant activity** in the trees, you'll want to stop and take a closer look. Because ants feed on honeydew, their appearance can be an indication that aphids or another honeydew-producing pest is present.

Eastern Tent Caterpillar

Eastern tent caterpillars are easy to spot by their large **silken webs in tree crotches**. However, it is best to target these pests when they are still small in the early spring.

Eastern tent caterpillars rarely cause any permanent damage to healthy, well-established trees, and they can be a great meal for birds. However, their webs and feeding can be very unsightly, and they can cause some damage to small trees.

Hosts of this pest include **apple, cherry, crabapple, hawthorn, maple, peach, pear and plum**.



Young eastern tent caterpillars

Photo: Seabrooke Leckie

Always Read and Follow Label Directions for Safe Use of Any Pesticide!