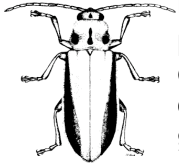


ELM LEAF BEETLE IN SANTA MARGARITA

Much has happened since the elms were planted in the 1890s by Santa Margarita's early residents. At that time, English and other European elm species were widely planted in many fledgling communities of central and northern California. Of course, no one knew then that planting so many trees of just one species, in one area, is not a good idea. The benefits of biodiversity within the urban (or community) landscape are, even today, yet to be fully understood and widely appreciated. Nor did they know then that non-native species can invite exotic pest outbreaks and a host of other problems. They were just continuing a pattern started by early settlers in New England: landscaping new settlements with familiar and beloved shade trees.

In 1922, the California State Board of Forestry described the English elm as a nearly ideal street tree, remarkably free of insect pests and diseases, drought tolerant, and very aesthetically pleasing. Two years later, in 1924, the ELB arrived in California, after having been inadvertently introduced to the United States from Europe in the 1830s, and everything changed for the English elm, ELB's preferred host. ELB is primarily an aesthetic problem causing unsightly trees, repeated leaf dropping, and the loss of summer shade. Although stress resulting from ELB damage may contribute to tree mortality through increased disease susceptibility, ELB alone does not generally kill trees.



While the exact date of ELB's arrival in Santa Margarita remains a mystery, county records indicate that ELB was recognized as a pest here in the late 1950s. Severe ELB outbreaks occurred in the early 1960s, prompting residents to seek control assistance from county agents. Various chemical treatment programs, reflecting then current recommendations, were sporadically applied on a community wide basis through the 1970s. DDT and lead arsenate were powerful weapons in the war against creepy crawlies of all sorts, including ELB. Of course, most people didn't know then what we know now about the insidious effects of these highly toxic and environmentally persistent insecticides. Even after those materials were banished from the urban landscape (and elsewhere), other broad-spectrum insecticides, albeit not nearly as environmentally persistent nor as toxic, were recommended as replacements. We now know that even these replacements, when used indiscriminately, can cause myriad adverse effects, including secondary pest outbreaks, pest resistance and soil and groundwater contamination. But times were changing and integrated pest management (IPM), a concept borne in the 1950s, began to receive more and more attention in the 1980s.

Using an IPM approach to prevent and suppress pest problems minimizes adverse impacts to human health, the environment and nontarget organisms. In 1994, the University of California released *Pests of Landscape Trees and Shrubs ~An Integrated Pest Management Guide* (UC DANR Publ. #3359), a valuable resource which includes a description of an effective and ecologically sound ELB IPM strategy. Development of that strategy required decades of field studies detailing the biology and ecology of ELB and its natural enemies, as well as field trials to evaluate the efficacy and appropriate use conditions for a number of potential ELB management tools. Some of those studies and trials, under the direction of the late UC Berkeley entomology professor Donald Dahlsten, were conducted in Santa Margarita (1989-1993).

Through the efforts of many, a number of promising tools have been developed. Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes among these tools so we need to work together if we want to achieve control. The Santa Margarita Community Forestry is a volunteer organization, formed in 1996, to support and encourage community participation in tree planting and care activities. Shade doesn't just happen...it takes a community! Visit www.smcf.org or contact Bev Gingg, coordinator (volunteer), at 549-9319 or info@smcf.org for more information.

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~ A Chapter of the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County ~