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SOAPBERRY BORER

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Soapberry Borer, *Agrilus prionurus* (Coleoptera: Buprestidae)

An Exotic Pest Recently Detected in Texas

The soapberry borer (*Agrilus prionurus*), a native of Mexico, was first reported in Bastrop County in 2003. Since then, it has been detected in several additional counties, including near or within the cities of Austin, College Station, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and Waco.

As its populations expand rapidly in Texas, this insect is killing all sizes of soapberry trees larger than 2 inches in diameter. It may eventually threaten western soapberry populations throughout the tree's range, which extends from northern Mexico to Missouri, and west to Arizona.

Leaves and fruit of western soapberry, a medium-sized, drought-hardy tree, resemble those of the invasive Chinaberry tree, but the leaves are not double compound and the leaflets do not have serrated (toothed) margins.

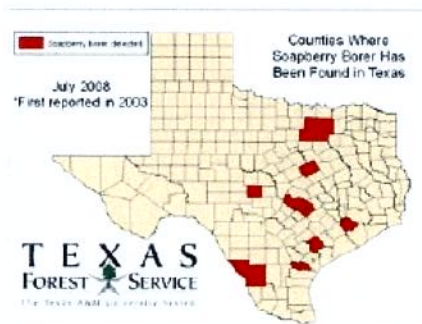
Infestations of soapberry borer are similar to those of emerald ash borer, *Agrilus planipennis*, another introduced pest that is killing thousands of ash trees in the Midwest. Fortunately, the emerald ash borer, a close relative of the soapberry borer, has yet to be found in Texas.

Infested soapberry trees can be easily recognized by the exposed sapwood that results when birds and squirrels chip off the bark to feed on the larvae. Bark chips accumulate at the base of the tree. A heavily-infested tree will be completely girdled by white larvae feeding beneath the bark.

The adult beetle is about ½ inch-long, shining black and distinctively marked with four small white spots on the wing covers. Larvae are flat-headed wood borers that may attain an inch or more in length as they mature. After feeding beneath the bark, the larvae bore into the wood to complete development and to pupate. The adult leaves a D-shaped exit hole in the bark as it emerges.

Western soapberry appears to exhibit little resistance to this introduced pest. Little else is known about the insect's biology or methods of control. However, to protect high-value soapberries in your yard, conventional borer preventative treatments may be applied prior to insect attack. One product, Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control®, which contains imidacloprid, can be applied to the root zone. Follow directions on the label. No other tree species appear to be attacked by this insect, so treatment should be limited to soapberry trees.

For more information or to report new infestations, please contact Dr. Ron Billings at (979) 458-6650, rbillings@tfs.tamu.edu, or Joe Pase at (936) 639-8170, jpase@tfs.tamu.edu.

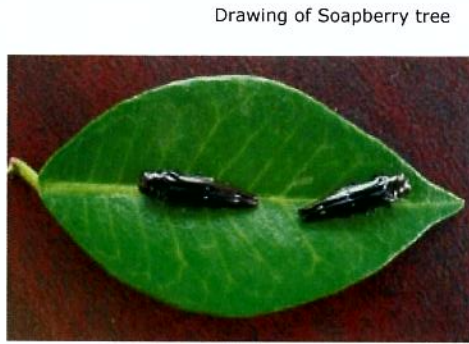


Soapberry Borer range in Texas





Soapberry leaves and berries



Adults of *A. prionurus* (note 4 white spots)



D-shaped exit hole

Soapberry Borer infestations



Characteristic symptoms of *A. prionurus* infestations