

David and Goliath Battle in Houston County
(Asian Ambrosia Beetle)
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When little David defeated giant Goliath it was a classic battle. The diminutive David, his sling and his trust in God versus Goliath, his sword and his overbearing trust in self. You know the rest - David laid Goliath out in the dust.

The battle of David and Goliath proportions is going on now in Houston County. It may even be in your yard and you don't know it.

A new friend of mine noticed it first in her yard when her large White pine began to brown up. She thought it would be okay though, just a little stress. However, it just got worse.

By the time I saw the problem, it was terminal. The little warriors had vanquished the mighty giant. Sawdust was coming out of the tree, sap was oozing and the tree was brown. Once this happens to a tree, it is too late.

The 'David' in this case was Asian Ambrosia beetles. These minute brown beetles bore holes straight into the tree and infect the interior with a fungus. They feed on the fungus which also kills the tree. They often push sawdust out of holes making the tree look like it has toothpicks sticking out of it.

Once Ambrosia beetles get in, it is too late. Remove the tree, destroy it to kill the beetles and replant.

'What can I do?,' my friend asks. First select trees well adapted to our area. White pines grow well here for 20 or so years and then die suddenly. I think they cannot take our droughts. Did you know it has not been this dry so early in the year since 1925? Call our office for a list of drought tolerant trees.

In this situation, the main problem was tree selection. I expect White pines to die suddenly, but what can we do beyond this? Ambrosia beetles can also attack well adapted trees.

Keep trees watered well. Wet the soil eighteen inches deep about every 10 to 14 days. You cannot do this with a hand-held hose. Use soaker hoses and sprinklers left on for an hour or two and then see how deeply they wet the soil. Deep, infrequent watering is the key.

You can sometimes slow Asian Ambrosia beetles spread by spraying trunks of just planted, stressed or very young trees with Permethrin. Read and follow all label directions. This will not work though once they are inside.

Be on the lookout for another 'David'. Beetles are common on pines. Black turpentine beetle attacks the base of trees while other beetles attack the top. They feed under the bark, laying eggs and destroying the trees ability to transport water and food. It is like having clogged

arteries. The tree declines and can die. Look for holes the size of pencil leads and sap coming out of trees.

The beetles love stressed trees, so keep them healthy. Do not dig much around trees. Put mulch around trees out to the edge of the branches. Most importantly - water trees as described above. Water helps them resist insects and repair injury. Unfortunately, there is no longer any chemical available to help prevent the pine beetles spread.

Of course, the original David and Goliath story differs from our narrative. Originally David was the good guy and the giant was evil. In our case, we want to save the giant and prevent the little guys from prevailing. Follow these tips to see if you can write a happy ending for your trees. For more information contact the Houston County Extension Service at 542-2020 or E-mail uge2153b@arches.uga.edu or see our website at <http://www.griffin.peachnet.edu/ga/houston>