



Technical Bulletin

Forest Health
Notes # 27
Issued: 12/22/2009

Christmas Trees May Be The Source Of Unwanted Houseguests

At this time of year when trees are brought into our homes one must be aware that these trees serve as the potential home or feeding site of numerous organisms while in nature. Trees freshly cut or potted trees that are brought indoors may carry with them unwanted houseguests.

It is important to inspect your tree before you bring it indoors. Examine the main stem of the tree, the branches, top and bottom, for any signs or symptoms of insect activity. Looking specifically for insects, boring holes, boring dust, resin flow or pitch tubes, needles webbed together, etc. Spiders may also be encountered and usually associated with their webbing. After you have inspected and removed any and all unwanted material from your tree you may want to take some additional preventive measures. Vigorously shaking the trees can help in reducing the introduction of unwanted guests into your homes. Shaking removes insects, spores, pollen, debris, and bird nests (hopefully). Washing the tree with water and air-drying before taking in doors also helps remove these unwanted houseguests.

Of major concern in the south are fire ants that are commonly found in Christmas tree farms. Fire ants are a major concern because many individuals have serious reactions to their stings. If the selected tree is close to any fire ant mounds, it should be shaken vigorously and then inspected closely. It may take more than one good shaking to dislodge all the unwanted ants and other unwelcome guests.

There are numerous other insects that can be potentially introduced such as aphids. During warmer periods they may be found with ants tending them. If they remain on the tree feeding honeydew may be produced that will cause the surface of the needles to become a bit sticky. But of greater concern is if they fall onto the carpet, especially light colored carpet and then are stepped on, they will leave a discoloration potentially staining the carpet.

If a tree is brought indoors with a few unwanted houseguests, it is important not to spray the tree with an aerosol pesticide because they are flammable. There is really no reason to use a pesticide on the few intruders that remain. The new environment is drastically different. With lower humidity,

most will desiccate and die in a few days. As they die and drop to the floor, one can sweep or vacuum them up along with any other debris that may become dislodged during decorating and other activities around the tree.

For more information, there are numerous websites that can provide additional information such as <http://www.bugwood.org/christmas/97007.html>.

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