



Unwelcome Guests

In February, I ventured into the chilly winter morning rain to cover a local story that hit closer to home than I would have liked. A short walk from my apartment in Chicago, the City was beginning an unfortunate phase in its aggressive strategy to exterminate the destructive Asian Long-Horned Beetle.

Crews from the Department of Streets and Sanitation's Forestry Bureau converged on the city's Ravenswood neighborhood to begin clear-cutting trees that had recently become infested with the pest. Trees that had stood watch over the community for decades fell in seconds, and chippers pulverized their remains to a fine mulch, shredding much of the neighborhood's beauty and character at the same time.

This may seem extreme, but it was the most viable solution to a problem that started making news last summer.

The Asian Beetles are native to China. Their migration to the United States can be credited to the globalization of the world economy. Despite aggressive deterrents initiated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the pests have managed to travel to this country in wooden crates aboard shipping vessels.

Scars from the insects' entry holes alerted City officials to the infestation in Chicago. The beetles lay their eggs under the bark of live hard-wood trees. When the larva hatch, they burrow deep into the wood to feed on the tree's soft tissue as they mature. The new adult beetles chew their way out of the tree, leaving extensive damage behind. After mating, the beetles often reinfest the same tree until it can no longer survive. Then they simply move on to the next tree in line.

Asian Beetles are not as selective as most diseases. They feed on any and all hard-wood tree varieties, and there is no known pesticide that kills them. The City's drastic clear-cutting solution was the only way to protect healthy trees from the menace.

Chicago is not the first American city to fall victim to the Asian Beetle. New York has been battling its own infestation since 1996. The 450 trees scheduled to be removed in Chicago sounds like a staggering number, but New York has already lost over 1,000 trees to the pest.

To date, these represent the only known beetle infestations in the U.S., but the insects have been detected in shipping warehouses in several American cities. Government regulatory agencies are doing their best to keep the pests out, but the threat remains.

The best defense against the Asian Beetle is early detection. Trees are an important fixture in our landscapes. We often take them for granted, but we certainly notice when they're gone.

No doubt, most of you have trees on the grounds you maintain. If you haven't already, incorporate regular inspections as part of your maintenance routine.

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Tip o' the Month

String Trimmers

According to Mark Michaels, senior forestry product manager at Husqvarna Forest and Garden Co., there are five main points to consider when buying a string trimmer:

- How will the trimmer be used? Will you be doing mostly trimming, or edging, or both? Evaluate a trimmer's versatility, and look for models that can accommodate various cutting attachments.
- Look for a trimmer that offers high power to weight ratio (0.15 - 0.21 kw/kg) and low exhaust emissions.
- Consider ergonomic issues. A loop handle that's adjustable can provide balance and comfort for a variety of users. Look for a unit with low vibration; a good design separates the engine and shaft vibrations from the handle.
- Always test drive your leading candidates. Most servicing dealers will allow you to take trimmers for a spin.
- Buy from a company that offers a good warranty on the shaft and ignition. Make sure your retailer will service or repair your trimmer in a manner that's convenient and affordable.

A number of optional blades and heads are also available to help with your trimming needs:

- For light to heavy weeds, nylon line will do the trick. A smaller diameter line will cut fast, but will wear quickly. Thicker line requires a more powerful trimmer, but it will cut heavier grass, it's better for edging, and it will last longer.
- For heavy grass, brush, and dense weeds, look for multi grass and brush blades. Loop-handle trimmers require an additional safety kit to adapt them for use.
- For cutting saplings and small trees, use the saw blade recommended by the manufacturer.

