

Arborist Sam Cooper says homeowners should take action now to deal with damage caused by the invasive emerald ash borer.

Arborist warns about the fate of area ash trees

Emerald ash borer spells doom for Warrenton's canopy

By Caitlin Scott
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A little green bug keeps arborist Sam Cooper pretty busy these days.

Cooper, certified arborist and owner of Oak Grove Tree Experts, expects to have his work cut out for him due to the damage inflicted by the invasive emerald ash borer (EAB).

This pesky green beetle comes from East Asia, and has been destroying populations of American ash trees ever since it appeared in Detroit, Mich., back in 2002.

"North America is home to around 17 billion ash trees, and there are plenty of them here in Warrenton," said Cooper. "Right now there is a 5 to 10 percent mortality rate in ash trees. By this time next year, it will be closer to 60 percent."

Aaron Johns, a line-clearing arborist who lives and works near Flint, Mich., agrees.

"Over the last couple of years, the vast majority of the emergency work I do is clearing ash trees near power lines," said Johns. "The trees snap near the base where the roots have decayed. It's pretty devastating."

Though this winged green

EAB Timeline

2002: The emerald ash borer is native to Asia and was found in Michigan. It is not known how it was brought into the U.S.

2003: The first infestation in Virginia was eradicated.

2008: EAB once more appears in Virginia.

2016: The pest is now found in 25 counties throughout Virginia.

Source: Virginia
Cooperative Extension

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SAM COOPER

beetle measures just half an inch, experts predict it will wipe out the entire ash tree population of North America within the next few decades.

Reaching heights of 100 to 120 feet, mature ash trees typically fall within two years after dying from from EAB infestation.

"EAB eggs hatch around July, and the larvae feed aggressively on the tissues that bring water and nutrients to the leaves," said Johns.

"As the ash's leaves turn yellow and shed in the fall, it appears as though it's progressing normally along with the surrounding trees, but it's actually dying," he said. "Later on, you can see the bugs' small, D-shaped exit holes all over the trunks."

Cooper warns that even if these native hardwoods appear to be healthy now, their death is a certainty.

"I'd encourage homeowners and property owners to be proactive," said Cooper. "We are about to get hit with an even more aggressive wave of the bugs, which will likely wipe out all of the ash trees in our area within the next two years."

"The safest thing to do is to get your property looked at. Have these trees removed before they fall and damage property, or worse, hurt someone," he said.

In addition to liability hazards, a die-off this severe also comes with costly economic

and environmental threats, especially in larger cities where the ash species is common in public spaces.

In the city of Warrenton, ash trees line the streets of residential areas and make up many of the trees found on large properties.

According to Cooper, Culpeper Street and Springs Road host significant ash tree populations.

George Newman, a Haymarket resident, discovered last August that the 12 large ash trees on his 3-acre property were all dying.

Worried that his grandchildren would get hurt climbing a dead tree, he set out to find help.

"Sam came out to look at the trees, and he showed me the burrows the ash borer had made under the bark," said Newman. "He's already removed three of them — it's amazing to see him climb. He's coming back to remove the rest, and he'll plant three different trees for us."

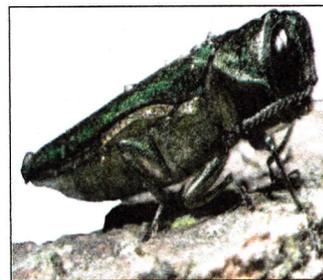
To prevent high costs to homeowners and city planners, early removal is key. Because EAB feed so aggressively, the trees quickly become dangerous to climb.

Tree removal companies in states that have been impacted by EAB have issued a no-climb policy on dead ash trees due to the hazards they pose for even the most skilled climbers.

As a result, cranes and other heavy equipment are required to take down the trees, which significantly increases costs.

"I wouldn't recommend going the insecticide route for this particular blight," said Cooper. "Insecticide treatments can become very costly, and need to be reapplied every few years. These trees are already on their way out — insecticide will not turn this around."

Cooper recommends an immediate removal followed by replanting. He favors



Emerald Ash Borer

species like black gum and varieties of oaks, like Southern red, white, willow and post oaks.

"We get to appreciate the beauty of the trees that were planted generations ago," said Cooper. "Future generations should enjoy the same privilege."

When it comes to understanding trees, Cooper's knowledge is impressive. When it comes to climbing them, he's considered one of the best in the world. In the 2011 International Society of Arboriculture Tree Climbing Competition (ITCC) in Sydney, Australia, he won one event and placed in another. In 2013, he was the climbing champion in the Mid-Atlantic chapter of the ITCC, beating out competitors from Maryland, DC, West Virginia and Virginia. He's also the inventor of the Cooper's Hitch, a climbing hitch that is recognized by the International Society of Arboriculture and is used globally, both in competitive and practical arenas.

"It requires a lot of skill to avoid accidents and damage to property when removing these ash trees once they die," continued Cooper. "This is not just another dead tree. The structural integrity is seriously compromised and requires a high level of expertise to remove safely."

Oak Grove Tree Experts is running a special discount for proactive ash tree removal. To learn more or to schedule a free consultation, visit www.oakgrovetree.com or call (540) 937-2500.