

## It's Bagworm Season

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Bagworm populations ebb and flow. Right now I am hoping that we are in an ebbing portion of that cycle because we had plenty of them a few years back. Bagworms are those little insects that love cedar trees, but will feed on almost anything with leaves, and create a little bag that they live in while feeding and decorate it with bits of foliage from whatever tree they are feeding on. While annoying they don't generally damage deciduous trees BUT can kill a cedar tree if populations are high enough and left untreated.

Bagworms overwinter as an egg in the bag of the female bagworm. They likely started hatching out in the last 10 days or so. Given the extra heat it may have been a little earlier this year. In fact, we actually hit the minimum threshold of growing degree days by mid May this year. They will continue to hatch out for another week to ten days. Egg filled bags in the shade will take longer to hatch than those in full sun. Ideally, if we have bagworm infested plants, we want to treat when all the eggs have hatched and while they are still small. Which means you need to be scouting your trees and shrubs that have been infested in the past.

More than one homeowner has ignored the early signs of infestation until all of a sudden, when it's almost too late to do anything, they suddenly see the two inch long bags. When bagworms first hatch out it doesn't take them very long to form their first little bag. The bag at that time is only about a quarter of an inch long. You have to look close to see them. If there are just a few bags, you may not notice them for a while. If there's a heavy infestation though, the host plant, especially a cedar or arborvitae, will start to show a very subtle but noticeable color shift. The foliage will take on a paling or yellowish hue. Heavy infestations can be noticed as you drive by the plant on the street at normal speeds!

If these heavy infestations are left unchecked on junipers or arborvitae, they will defoliate the tree to the point that it will die. If you have treated your trees/shrubs for the past couple of years there is a good chance that you have gotten them under control. Monitor for reinfestation the next couple of weeks but you may not have to treat this year. Be aware though that young bagworms will dangle from a tree on a piece of silk and then wait for the wind to catch them and blow them somewhere. Silking or ballooning bagworms can blow for over one half mile. So a "clean" tree early in the season may suddenly have some infestation a few weeks later. Stay vigilant! If last year was the first year you treated, I would plan to treat again this year because just one missed bagworm last year can result in 500 to 1,000 little bagworms this year!

The secret to getting good control when treating for bagworms is to use a hose end sprayer or any sprayer that can deliver a lot of product. For most homeowners that means a hose end sprayer. You really have to soak the tree down, to the point that the spray is dripping off the branches. You need to soak those little bags down! Just about any lawn and garden insecticide will control bagworms if labeled for them. Currently my favorite product is called spinosad. This is considered an organic control and is probably the best thing out there especially for larger bagworms. It isn't the cheapest, but it works very well and minimizes impact to non-target species. If you find you need to treat I suggest two applications about two weeks apart with the first application being applied between June 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. With heavy infestations, I would certainly encourage two applications. If you aren't finding any, hold off on the spraying, but keep checking every three or four days!