

Emerald ash borer



There are many trees in the world, but only a relatively small number actually flourish in our challenging environment.

True desert trees, like mesquite and **desert** willow, thrive here. Fortunately, we have a bigger selection than just those two, including ashes. You can find different ash trees growing perfectly well all around the country. I read there are over seven billion ash trees growing in the US!

Arizona ash would be an obvious choice for this region, but Raywood and fan-tex ashes tolerate desert conditions remarkably well, as long as they receive enough water and the occasional hit of compost tea. We have so few tough shade trees in the desert; we need to keep them healthy and happy.

Not everything is good for American ash trees, unfortunately. There is a pest making its way across the continent, causing devastation in its path. Its only redeeming feature is that it affects only ash.

This pest is a vivid green slender insect, about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long. The emerald ash borer has been marching from east to west, killing its hosts.

Such a small thing with such a pretty color is such a terrible villain! From the time it was accidentally introduced into the US, it has killed tens of millions of ash trees. Since its initial sighting in 2002, it spread throughout the northeast and a sizeable chunk of the central United States.

To prevent it from spreading even more than it already has, the Department of Agriculture has imposed quarantines on wood from **21 states** and two Canadian provinces. This is one of the few ways to slow down its migration.

It continues to expand its range, albeit more slowly than it would otherwise.

The difficulty is that people do not always pay attention. A cartoon gives a good explanation of how this insect has been able to continue its lethal journey. In this cartoon, a big man is carrying a bundle of firewood. Strolling next to him is an emerald ash borer wearing a t-shirt that says, “I’m with stupid”.

People who want to save a few dollars frequently carry their own firewood when they go camping. Too often, they bring it from infested states where there is now lots of **dead** ash wood, to places where the borer has not yet been established.

This bit of misery has not reached Nevada – yet. We need to keep our ash trees alive; hence, all of us should be careful and observant.

Being only up to a half inch long, the insect itself is easily overlooked.

The adults are not the killers, however. Adults eat a few leaves, but don’t kill the tree. Its voracious babies are the bad actors. If an ash has a D-shaped hole in the bark, look closer. A D-shaped hole is the exit for the adults who grew from the juveniles who destroyed part of the tree’s circulatory system.

This is a real concern. If you see this kind of a hole, especially if the ash tree looks stressed, call Cooperative Extension.

Dr. Angela O’Callaghan is the Social Horticulture Specialist for University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. Contact ocallaghana@unce.unr.edu or 702-257-5581.