

(YOU CAN'T) BEAT THE BEETLES!

By Rick Barnes
Nature Scapes, Inc.

Attacks on our landscapes and gardens are often relentless, thwarting our best efforts at keeping our slice of the great outdoors looking beautiful. The culprits come in the form of all manners of organisms, chewing, digging, sucking, and damaging the plants we install and tend so carefully. We could devote a dozen issues of Georgia Commons to the pests that pester our grounds and still not mention them all. Today we will limit our discussion of pests to a group of animals that can be both hellions and heroes- the Beetles.

With over 28,000 species of Beetles in North America alone, these six-legged critters leave evidence of their presence all around us. For example, have you ever found a June Beetle "shell" clinging to a tree after its former inhabitant molted and moved on? Surely you've seen a glowing Lightning Bug on a summer night or helped your kids catch them for a natural lamp. Perhaps you have recoiled from the forceps-like mouthparts of the Stag Beetle or marveled at the resemblance of the Rhinoceros Beetle to its namesake. All of these are Beetles, and these, like most, cohabitate innocuously with mankind.

Pillaging the Pines!

This is not the case with all members of this Insect Order. Too often we are confronted with dead pine trees on our properties, often the result of attack by armies of Pine Beetles. While widespread damage from the Southern Pine Beetle may occur in cycles, the mild winters and overall drought conditions we have experienced in the last six years have favored a proliferation of the insects. Adults attack environmentally stressed trees, create galleries underneath the bark and lay eggs that later hatch into cambium-ravaging nymphs. Life cycles occur in as little as 26 days during the summer, so the pests can quickly kill a tree and move on to others in the stand. For this reason, it is best not to prune pine trees in the warmer months of the year, and if a tree has been infested, it should be completely removed from

the site to minimize infestation of adjacent trees. The presence of "pitch tubes" in the bark or accumulations of sawdust on the outer bark on the tree or at the base of the tree indicates the presence of Pine Beetle as opposed to another possible cause for the demise of a tree. Pitch tubes are small holes in the bark with protruding accumulations of sap, almost as if a wad of chewed gum had been placed in a hole in the tree. In addition to the removal of infested and dead trees, chemical treatments of adjacent pines can also prevent the spread of the Beetle infestation, as can watering the trees during periods of drought and pruning at the proper time to minimize environmental stresses. Since there are several species of Beetle that produce similar symptoms on Pine trees, it is best to call your landscape management provider or tree specialist if you suspect a problem with your Pines.

Oriental Invasion.

A couple of pests worth talking about come to us from "across the other big pond." The Japanese Beetle was introduced into this country about 1916 and has found American horticulture to be a virtual all you can eat salad bar! Over 300 species of plants are consumed by the pest, from roses to the rose of Sharon and from Linden trees to lawns. The white, C-shaped grubs feed underneath the surface of the soil and can transform a green lawn into a brown doormat. The metallic green and copper-colored adults confine their feeding frenzy to the open sun, skeletonizing leaves and disfiguring blooms. Control measures vary in method and effectiveness. Applications of Milky-Spore disease attack grubs in the soil, as do many species of birds, which may also feed on adults. Several species of Insect, such as the Praying Mantis, either feed on or parasitize adults. Physical removal of insects from the plants into a bucket of soapy water is an effective, though labor-intensive, method of control. Several insecticides are labeled for use on Japanese Beetles and have good knock-down capabil- [Continues on page 26.]