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Happy Holidays from MassHort

Welcome to the December edition of the MassHort Leaflet. As we come to the end of the year, we can look back at a full schedule of successful events, education programs and beautiful garden days here at Elm Bank. But time doesn't stand still and neither do we, as you will find in this edition's articles.

This season, please consider a gift membership for a friend or relative who cares about gardening. We are offering a special membership price for those who have not been MassHort members in the past. And if you are shopping at White Flower Farm, mention your MassHort membership. White Flower Farm will apply 10% of your purchase to your support of our Society.

Happy Holidays from all of us at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

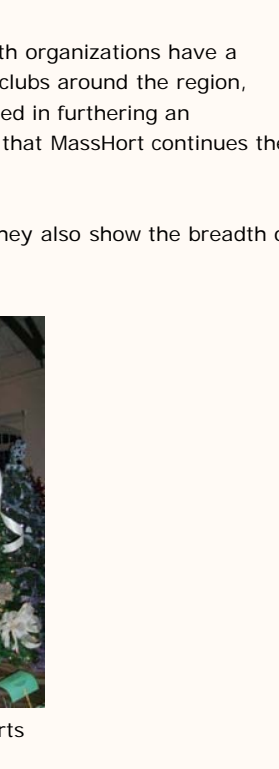
Michael Opton
Editor
Leaflet

Three Dover Garden Clubs offer distinct viewpoints for the Festival of Trees

One tree celebrates music. Another celebrates nature. A third unabashedly appeals to the kid in everyone and puts under the tree all the great stuff that five garden clubs wish they'd find on Christmas morning.

Dover has many garden clubs (an eye-catching ratio for a town of fewer than 6000 residents) and three of them have entries at this year's Festival of Trees, which runs through December 4. Each of the entries is stunning. Each shows a great deal of thought in planning and care in execution. But each one also captures a viewpoint that at once demonstrates just how many ways a holiday tree can be interpreted.

For the Noanett Garden Club, the tree is dedicated to Nona Haffnerreifer and Jane Smith, club members who died during the past year. Both were known as much for their love of music as their interest in gardening. When Harriet Halligan set out to create a tree, those two friends and their music was foremost in her mind.

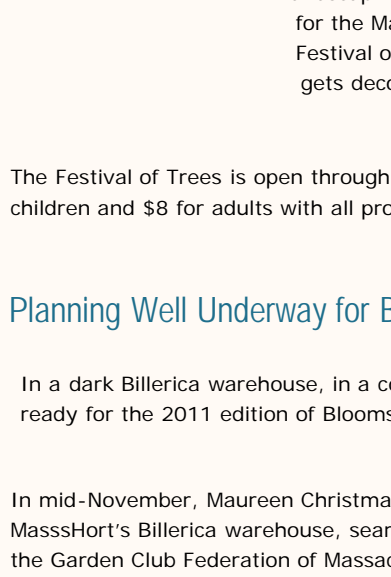


A musically themed entry from the Noanett Garden Club honored two members who passed away during 2010

The result is a tree that celebrates all things musical. There are golden trumpets and French horns, guitars and harps. Doves and angels also populate the tree and sprays of hydrangea add a pleasing touch. The tree skirt is a black and white arrangement of musical notes. The overall effect is joyous.

Noanett Garden Club President Chris Wood says the tree, "is a special way to remember two visitors who passed away. We had a lot of fun collecting the musical ornaments and decorating the tree. We hope that friends to the show will enjoy it, too."

Fifty feet away, the Dover Garden Club took its cue from nature. There, a tree is filled with reminder of the woodlands. Club member Tama Smith, who designed the tree, found birds nest ornaments, small animals made from dried plant fibers, dried fruit, pine cones, and even wrapped cinnamon sticks. At the base of the tree, there's a copy of Elsa Beskow's lavishly illustrated classic, "Children of the Forest". The tree skirt is a forest scene.



Tama Smith puts the finishing touches on the entry for the Dover Garden Club.

"The inspiration for the tree came from walking in the woods and the beauty that is found along the way," says Tama. "I'm drawn to tree bark, mounds of moss, bits of birch bark and the surprise of coming across the wildlife that lives in the woods. This is our second year donating a tree to the Festival. It's a great sense of satisfaction for the club."

You smell the Powisset Garden Club's entry before you see it. It's a heavenly scent of lavender. Then you spy the tree and the same lavender theme is apparent in its lush decoration (the scent comes courtesy of a dozen or more sachets that are used as ornaments). Hundreds of glistening, lavender-colored snowflakes, shells, and garlands twinkle. Seven club members decorated the tree in an afternoon-long marathon.

But it's what under the tree that draws gags from attendees, and causes the box beside the tree to fill up with raffle tickets. There's a basket filled with all kinds of treats like luxury soaps, lotions and creams; a relaxation CD, a Piles DVD, bath essentials, a spa robe, and three gift certificates: one for a spa in Wellesley, one for skincare specialists in Brookline, and one for a lavender store in Southborough.

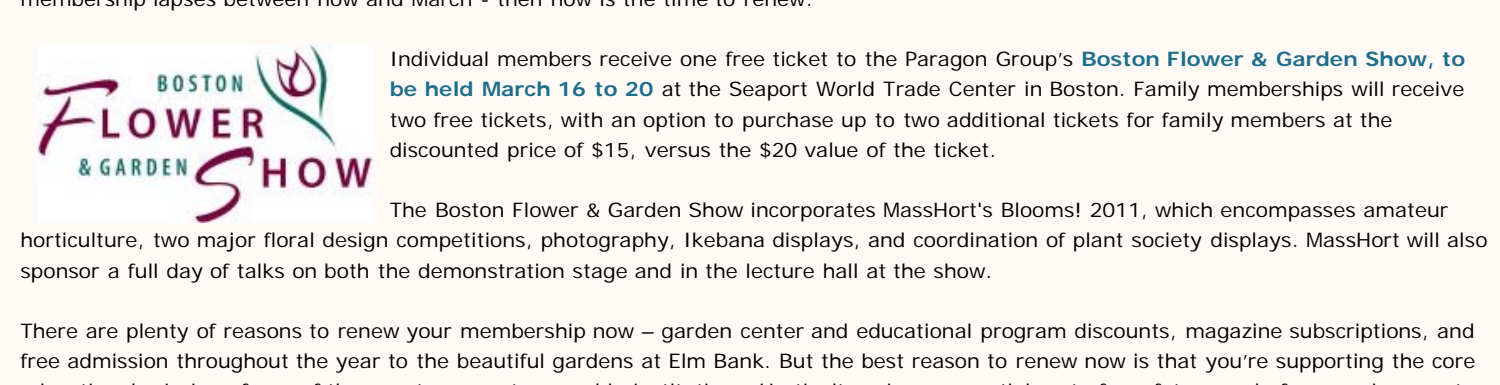


Members of the Powisset Garden Club with their finished tree.

Liz Marson, Powisset Garden Club President, says club members volunteered at the Festival in 2009 and wanted to create a tree for this year's event. "We wanted to incorporate plants, herbs and gardening into our theme, and 'lavender' fit the bill," Liz says. "We're thrilled at the response to what we call the 'Spa Relaxation Tree' and hope the winter holidays is required by January 15. We'll have a full section from an earlier show that would work well to showcase a special exhibit. The staging was located and you'll see it in use next March.

Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts (GCFM) First Vice President and MassHort Trustee Heidi Kost-Gross says the three club entries are emblematic of a close working relationship between GCFM and MassHort. "Both organizations have a commitment to our communities and their garden clubs. This year's Festival of Trees includes entries from garden clubs around the region, including clubs in Lexington and Chelmsford, as well as a GCFM entry. MassHort and GCFM are both keenly interested in furthering an understanding and appreciation of gardening, horticulture and the environment. The Festival of Trees helps ensure that MassHort continues the educational programs that are key to its mission."

The three trees are eloquent statements about the creative imagination and skill of the club members involved. They also show the breadth of interests represented by the clubs as they each set out to create a unique theme. Each one is worth a close look.



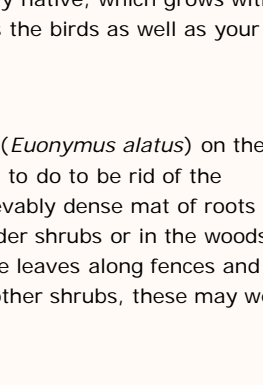
Parterre Landscaping's entry for the MassHort Festival of Trees gets decorated. Crowds at the Festival of Trees the day after Thanksgiving. The Bartlett Tree Experts 'Tree Tree' and a Hungerford Carriage House.

The Festival of Trees is open through December 4. Hours are 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekends. Admission free for children and \$8 for adults with all proceeds going to support MassHort's gardens and its educational mission.

Planning Well Underway for Blooms! at the 2011 Boston Flower & Garden Show

In a dark Billerica warehouse, in a cool greenhouse at Elm Bank, and in sunny windows all over New England, gardeners are starting to get ready for the 2011 edition of Blooms! at the Boston Flower & Garden Show.

In mid-November, Maureen Christmas and Director of Operations Clark Bryan went with flashlights through MassHort's Billerica warehouse, searching for staging for a particular floral design challenge. Maureen is Chair of the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts' Design Division I and she remembered a pair of large blue structures from an earlier show that would work well to showcase a special exhibit. The staging was located and you'll see it in use next March.



Clark Bryan and Maureen Christmas inspect staging at MassHort's Billerica warehouse.

Amateur Horticulture is also on the minds of New Englanders this December. According to the rules, to enter a plant competition, it must have been owned by an exhibitor by December 13, 2010. While most plants have been entered by growers for many years (there are even a number of multi-generational entries each year), there's still time to find that great, unusual specimen, bring it home, nurture it over the winter, and put it in competition for the 2011 show.

If you don't have a green thumb but you're a great photographer, there's going to be something brand new at Blooms!: a photography division. We're looking for terrific photos in six categories (you can see the full schedule here) and a total of 36 entries. Horticultural photography, of course, is nothing new (one of the first images ever captured was of a leaf). Exhibitions of such photography at major flower shows, though, are still a rarity. We'll have the results next March. Advance registration for the competition is required by January 15. We'll have a full section on the topic next month together with an interview with Division III Chair Beth Hume.

MassHort members, of course, get to see all this for free as one of their membership benefits. If you're not already part of the MassHort family, or if your membership is up for renewal, visit the membership section to make certain you're part of the fun.

MassHort again offering free Flower Show Tickets for members

The leaves are gone, the sky is grey. New Englanders are getting ready for winter. But just as sure as the next three months will bring snow, March will bring the Boston Flower & Garden Show. And, if you're a MassHort member, you're set. If you're not a member - or if your membership lapses between now and March - then now is the time to renew.

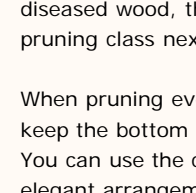


Individual members receive one free ticket to the Paragon Group's Boston Flower & Garden Show, to be held March 16 to 20 at the Seaport World Trade Center in Boston. Family memberships will receive two free tickets, with an option to purchase up to two additional tickets for family members at the discounted price of \$15, versus the \$20 value of the ticket.

The Boston Flower & Garden Show incorporates MassHort's Blooms! 2011, which encompasses amateur horticulture, two major floral design competitions, photography, Ikebana displays, and coordination of plant society displays. MassHort will also sponsor a full day of talks on both the demonstration stage and in the lecture hall at the show.

There are plenty of reasons to renew your membership now - garden center and educational program discounts, magazine subscriptions, and free admission throughout the year to the beautiful gardens at Elm Bank. But the best reason to renew now is that you're supporting the core educational mission of one of the country's most venerable institutions. Horticulture is an essential part of our future and of our holiday.

Oh, and renew your membership today and you will also receive a \$25 Gift Certificate to White Flower Farm, just in time for holiday shopping.

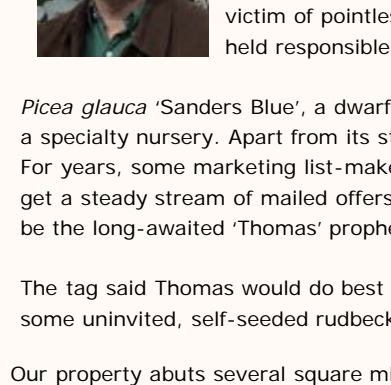


If you prefer to mail in your membership order form click here. You may also order any of these memberships by phone: 617-933-4963

It's Not Yet Winter in My Garden

by Betty Sanders

It's just a day away from December as this is written, there's a thin skin of ice on the pond, but --thank heaven for native plants--there's still color in my garden. This morning as the sun rose I lit up 'Itea Henry Garnet', a native shrub with lovely red and orange and gold foliage which still brightens the bed where it resides. If you grow burning bush for the color, please compare it to this lovely native, which grows with little attention, keeps its leaves late into fall every year, which doesn't push out other native plants and which feeds the birds as well as your soul.



Itea Henry Garnet in mid-November.

When my husband and I moved into this house, there were three burning bush (Euonymus alatus) on the property. We chain-sawed them that spring and thought that was all we needed to do to be rid of the invasive species. A year later, bedeviled by new sprouts, we dug out the unbelievably dense mat of roots left behind. But, ten years later, we still find tiny burning bushes popping up under shrubs or in the woods surrounding our property--their seeds live on. If you see one properly in orange leaves along fences and old stone walls, in uncared-for wood lots, or on your own property in amongst other shrubs, these may well be burning bush.



Oak Leaf Hydrangea in late November.

Burning bush provides no food or refuge for native animals. An invader from China, it outcompetes the plants that evolved here, eventually taking over woodlands. For its aggressiveness and other unlovely habits, Euonymus alatus was put on the Massachusetts invasives list and it has been illegal to sell them here for several years, but still they spread. Do your grandchildren a favor: cut down burning bush your yard and replace it with a Fothergilla or Itea for their pretty spring flowers and their magnificent fall color. Or, plant native blueberries for the berries and their dynamic autumn foliage.

A walk through the garden this morning was a reminder that not everything disappears with the first hard frost. Certainly we have the evergreens--the pines, hemlocks, spruce and chamaecyparis. We have rhododendrons, pieris and leucothoe. But we also have perennials that defy the weather. My favorites are the opimifolius that manage to look like they are ready to bloom all winter, the heucheras who keep their purples and chartreuse, copper and red leaves until it's time for their spring trim, the yuccas, who brilliantly yellow against the brown leaves mulching their bed and the Bergenia, whose flowers shine in the spring then sit quietly all summer before the leaves turn a beet red for the winter. Often buried in leaves now, but definitely worth uncovering is Dianthus 'rose de mai', with drought tolerant blue foliage that stays blue all year, though it is buried under flowers in the summer.

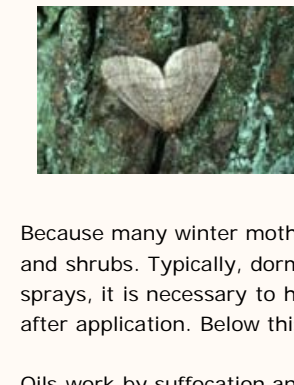


Fothergilla Mill. Ayr in mid-November.

These are all four season plants that pay for your care and attention with a year's worth of color. Sure, they may disappear beneath the snow, but you'll know when it melts, they'll be there enlivening your garden even before the spring bulbs excite the heart of every gardener.

You can explore more of Betty Sanders' gardening thoughts at www.BettyonGardening.com.

December Horticultural Hints



by Betty Sanders Lifetime Master Gardener

Yard work. Keep mowing the lawn as long as it grows -- usually until the ground freezes. The mower should be set at just two inches. By continuing to mow, you're mulching the leaves that are either falling on (or, more likely, blowing onto) your lawn. By mopping those leaves up now, they'll disintegrate over the winter, feeding the lawn and the tree roots below.

Vegetables in winter. If you are lucky enough to have anything left in your vegetable garden --Brussels sprouts, kale, leeks -- other tasty stuff. During the gardening season, we mix up as many as three gallons of the stuff and spray it once a month on everything that we care about. It smells awful for about three hours. Then it dries and the smell goes away, or at least abates to the human nose. To deer, it continues to smell and taste unpleasant. It is sufficiently effective that we have watched deer nose up to a hosta, start to take a nibble, then back off.

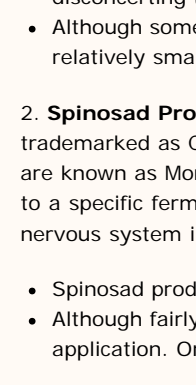
An excellent time to prune. Deciduous plants, those that lose their leaves in the winter, have now gone dormant. Examine the structure of the bare tree or shrub and decide what needs to be done to keep your plant growing the way you want. Start with easy-to-spot dead or diseased wood, then move on to crossing or rubbing branches. If you lack experience or have doubts, make a note to yourself to take a pruning class next spring. It will teach you to see what needs to be done to keep your plants in shape.

When pruning evergreens always start at the bottom and work your way up so that clippings don't confuse the process. And, remember to keep the bottom wider than the middle or top. Otherwise, you may end up with 'bare legs' syndrome. Evergreen pruning has a second benefit. Evergreens, when combined with red or white carnations. Don't bother bringing in hemlock, which sheds its needles almost immediately. Similarly holly must be kept in clean water and will still have a short life span. Leave the winter berries for the birds that need them for food. (Another good reason not to use winter berries in arrangements is that the berries quickly fall off and can disagree with small children or pets that find them on the floor.)

Lights Up! If you decorate with outdoor lights on your trees and shrubs be careful not to damage next spring's flowers (by having a light press up against the bud) or break small branches either during installation or removal. Lights should be placed on the plants and removed when the temperature is above freezing because the branches are more flexible in warmer weather.

You can explore more of Betty Sanders' gardening thoughts at www.BettyonGardening.com.

R.I.P., 'Thomas' Sanders Blue

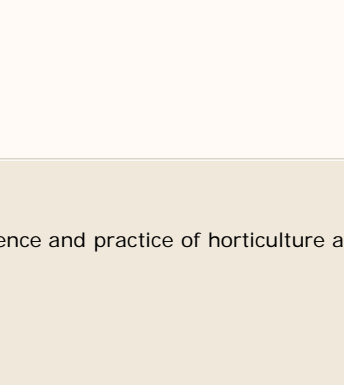


by Neal Sanders Leaflet Contributor

He wasn't even thirty inches high and he had barely settled in as part of the family. Finding him that cold morning, savagely mauled and mutilated, I could only think of what might he might have become when he grew up. He was a victim of pointless violence and a public mindset that those who killed him are themselves innocent victims that cannot be held responsible for their actions.

Picoa glauca 'Sanders Blue': a dwarf Alberta spruce with bright slate-blue needles, came to us in March. 'Thomas' was a friend who spotted it at a specialty nursery. Apart from its striking appearance, the 'Sanders-blue' needles are also our own. The 'Thomas' name was awarded in joke. You can use the cuttings to make holiday arrangements! Cuttings from spruce, cedar, pine and fir make great decorations on their own and shrubs and new caterpillars will quickly migrate from untreated areas to the oil-treated plants.

The tag said 'Thomas would do best in full sun and there is only one spot on our property that meets that requirement. And so we pulled out some uninvited, self-seeded rudbeckia from a planting bed by the street, giving Thomas a fitting site, a bucket of compost, and ample water. Our property abuts several square miles of town conservation watershed and that land is infested with deer. 'Infested' is not too strong a word. There are hundreds of them and, like most suburban towns around Boston, hunting is prohibited.



Artist's rendering of the culprit

We deal with the deer two ways. When we see them on our property, we run, scream and throw rocks at them. When we see them, or when we are home.

Our second, and more effective line of defense, is a product whose active ingredients are putrefied eggs and other nasty stuff. During the gardening season, we mix up as many as three gallons of the stuff and spray it once a month on everything that we care about. It smells awful for about three hours. Then it dries and the smell goes away, or at least abates to the human nose. To deer, it continues to smell and taste unpleasant. It is sufficiently effective that we have watched deer nose up to a hosta, start to take a nibble, then back off.

The plan is that the deer learn to avoid us, passing down accumulated wisdom from generation to generation. ("Pay attention, Bambi. The people who live here are crazy. They yell and throw rocks and their plants taste terrible.")



R.I.P. Sanders Blue 11-23-10 after being mauled by Bambi

But this autumn we let our guard down. We cleared the perennial beds, then mulched them with chopped leaves, leaving little for any critter to eat. The vulnerable evergreens were fenced, but Thomas seemed too small to attract attention. Had we been more diligent, perhaps Thomas would have been spared. Then again, being out on the street made him so -- and therefore vulnerable -- to the deer that populate our neighbors' lawns and gardens.

The photo shows the extent of the damage. The deer ate not only the needles (which have no nutritional value) but also the bark. There is no recovery from such an attack. Thomas is a goner.

This weekend, I'll dig him out and take the carcass to the compost pile at the back of the property. I'll do so with a sense of resignation that a hunter with a bow and arrow might have saved Thomas. Or even a well-aimed rock.

Neal Sanders is a frequent contributor to the Leaflet. We encourage you to read his contributions to our In the Garden Blog where he focuses on interesting cuttings that can be found in the Elm Bank gardens. Neal's first novel, Murder Imperfect, has been published. You can learn more about it here or order it through Amazon.com.

From the Archives - Coping with Winter Moths

Editors Note: the following article was first published in December 2009. Given the pervasive problem, we are reprinting it below.

by Betty Sanders

For the past few weeks, a quick look out your windows or a drive down the street in the early evening might have left you with the first impression that it was snowing. But the fluttering wings passing your windows are almost certainly winter moths (Operophtera brumata), one of the newest invaders to decimate our trees and gardens.



An unwelcome immigrant from Europe, male and female winter moths emerge over a period of several weeks beginning in late November and continuing through December. During this time period, the moths mate and the females lay eggs on the trunks and branches of their host plants. The eggs are visible as tiny ovals. Initially, they're green and loosely scattered along the bark, in bark furrows and on larger branches. After a short time period, the eggs turn a pinkish-orange color and thus become more visible. Within days prior to hatching in the early spring, winter moth eggs will turn very dark in color.



Because many winter moth eggs are exposed on the bark, horticultural oil spray can potentially be used to control the moths on small trees and shrubs. Typically, dormant eggs are applied in the late winter or very early spring depending on temperatures. When applying oil sprays, it is necessary to have temperatures above 45° F and to avoid applying oil when temperatures may dip below freezing for 24-48 hours after application. Below this threshold, there's a considerable potential for injuring the plant.

Oils work by suffocation and can be effective on the eggs, but the oil must completely cover the eggs at the time of application. Eggs that are protectively hidden within crevices and under lichens will not be covered by the spray and so will live to hatch. Given the phenomenal numbers of winter moth eggs in Massachusetts this year, oil sprays will most likely only achieve limited results: eggs are virtually everywhere on trees and shrubs and new caterpillars will quickly migrate from untreated areas to the oil-treated plants.

In general, winter moth caterpillars commonly feed on maples, oaks, apple, crabapples, ash, fringetrees and blueberry bushes. This pest has been known to drop from trees and feed on perennials such as roses and hosta. It is not been commonly seen feeding on magnolia and kousa dogwood.

The best estimates are that, in Massachusetts, winter moth eggs hatch between 20-50 Growing Degree Days, a period that can occur anytime from late March (during atypically warm springs) into the second or third week in April (cool springs). The tiny (less than 1 mm) caterpillars then spin a small silk strand and become air-buoyant and are carried upwards on air currents into the tree canopy where they then try to "weasel" between the bud scales, bracts, etc. to get into the buds.

They do not chew their way into buds via an entrance hole. If buds are not yet swollen enough for them to gain access, these small larvae will then sink down from the tree on a silken web and be carried away by the wind, which is the dispersal process known as ballooning.

This is the stage where the highest levels of injury to the plant can occur. The longer that the buds stay swollen but unopened, the greater potential for feeding injury. Winter moths will enter both leaf and flower buds.



Once the buds open, the larvae are known as "free-feeders" given that they are now on the foliage and free to move readily from one area to another. Winter moth will be in this stage until late May or early June whereupon they drop to the soil and almost immediately spin a cocoon and pupate. While still on the host plant, however, they are exposed and very treatable with a variety of products. Here are two:

1. Bacillus thuringiensis (kurstaki), also commonly known as B.t.k. This product is a bacterium that is specific to lepidopteran larvae (butterfly and moth). It must be ingested to be effective. Through a somewhat complicated biological process, this product will eventually form toxins that become lethal to the caterpillar. A few notes about its use:

- B.t.k. works best on the younger instar stages of caterpillars: older ones are much less affected.
• This product fits well into any IPM program in that it doesn't pollute the environment, harm the applicator nor does it affect beneficial organisms such as predators and parasitoids, when used as directed.
• If applied while the buds are still expanding, any new foliage that emerges days after application of this product will not be protected.
• Caterpillars that ingest B.t.k. will stop feeding almost immediately. However, they may not die for one to three days. It is often disconcerting to still see live caterpillars days after treatment but even though moving, they are not feeding.
• Although some may be concerned about B.t.k.'s effect on native lepidopteran species, it usually poses a limited negative effect given the relatively small areas being treated (e.g. individual trees and not entire forests).

2. Spinosad Products: The first version of this product in the U.S. was only available to commercial licensed pesticide applicators and was trademarked as Conserve SC™ (Dow AgroScience). Since 2004, homeowner spinosad products have become available and two common ones are known as Monterey Garden Insect Spray™ and Bull's-Eye Bioinsecticide™. These products are derived from a bacterium that is subjected to a specific fermentation process to derive the active ingredient(s) for the insecticide commonly known as spinosad. It works on the insect nervous system in a novel manner and can be effective as a contact spray as well as by ingestion. A few notes on its use:

- Spinosad products work well on caterpillars and all ages.
• Although fairly safe by not harming parasitoids and predators, the label does warn that it can be highly toxic to bees at the actual time of application. Once the spray has dried, however, the toxicity to foraging bees is much reduced.

There are other products that are available only to commercial licensed pesticide sprayers. If you believe you have a serious infestation affecting many trees on your property, you should consult an arborist or reputable tree service.

Other solutions have been tried but found generally ineffective. Physical barriers such as sticky tape are among these. The problem is that the number of winter moths are so great that, while the first moths are trapped, later moths will simply crawl over their bodies. Also, sticky tape doesn't address the caterpillars that have ballooned into the trees up to reach.

One of the greatest problems is that of timing. Because the caterpillars do not all hatch at the same time, and because they are protected inside leaf buds while they do damage, there is only a narrow window when treatments are effective

One of the most promising management techniques is the effort to develop a biological control for this pest. Biologists at UMass Amherst have been working on just such a program, but it will take several years for it to spread and reach a level where control is widespread.

You can explore more of Betty Sanders' gardening thoughts at www.BettyonGardening.com.

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About the Massachusetts Horticultural Society



Founded in 1829, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society is dedicated to encouraging the science and practice of horticulture and developing the public's enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of plants and the environment.