Our Woodlands & Habitat at Craneridge

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid FAQ

What is Hemlock Woolly Adelgid?

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) is a non-native aphid-like insect that feeds on the sap of Eastern Hemlock trees, eventually killing them.

What does the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid look like?

The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid is dark colored and less than 1/16 of an inch long. The insects themselves are hardly visible to the naked eye. *However, they cover themselves with a woolly, white material which is especially conspicuous in the winter months.*

How does Hemlock Woolly Adelgid spread?

Hemlock woolly adelgid is spread by wind, birds, and mammals, including humans. Infested nursery stock can also be responsible for introducing this insect into a given area.

What symptoms will trees exhibit if an infestation goes unnoticed?

Hemlock needles will turn yellow and drop prematurely. Defoliation can occur, and the tree will eventually die. These symptoms will appear within 3-5 years, depending on factors including tree health, stress, environmental conditions (e.g. drought), and density of HWA on the tree.

What should I do if I have Hemlocks in my property?

Inspect Hemlocks for the presence of this pest. ***Infestations are most obvious from November through April when the visible white "wool" is present on the insects.***

Should I cut down my Hemlocks if I find an infestation?

Cutting down infested hemlocks *may* be recommended only if treatment is not an option. In wooded settings, cutting infested trees will not completely stop the spread of HWA.

Can my trees be treated?

NOTE: The Woodlands & Habitat Committee will coordinate treatment of ALL HWA.
Yes. Depending on infestation, we will select from the following options, which are NYS approved. Sadly, we will not be able to save all our Hemlock trees.

- Horticultural oils can be sprayed on small trees. This treatment method must be applied annually.
- For large trees, the pesticide, Imidacloprid, can be administered by a licensed applicator through trunk application or soil injection. **There is no spraying.** Non-licensed, experienced individuals may also apply the same pesticide using the soil drench method. Imidacloprid provides approximately 5 years of control. **Be aware that there are limits to how much pesticide can be applied per acre each year. NYS law requires that we follow label limits.**
- While being actively tested by the NYS Hemlock Initiative at Cornell, "bio-controls" (bugs that eat HWA) are not currently a treatment option. However, our hope is that bio-controls will become a long-term solution within the next decade.

What are the risks of using pesticides?

The treatment for HWA is the same pesticide (Imidacloprid) that's used in the flea and tick medicines we apply to our pets, which our children then pet without harm. That's a much more direct interaction than anyone will get from walking through woods that have been treated.

Further, these pesticides are far different from pesticide use in lawn or agricultural settings. Treatment in Hemlock forest settings involves only soil and trunk applications of a single insecticide with numerous years between treatments. The pesticide is quickly drawn up into the trunk to reach the highest branches. HWA dies when it feeds on the sap from the tree. And, Hemlocks are wind pollinated, so bees and other pollinators do not visit these trees. Other insects that feed on tree sap within the tree will also be killed in the short-term.

Please keep in mind that losing all Hemlocks to HWA has a far greater impact to our ecosystem and all the wildlife that are supported by this keystone tree.

How will I know if I have successfully controlled the problem?

Follow-up inspections are necessary to determine the success. The Woodlands & Habitat Committee will assist with reminders and provide guidance for homeowners.

What will happen if I don't treat my hemlocks?

Heavy infestations of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid can kill trees in as little as four years.

Questions? Need help with ID?

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