

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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WSU Extension has received several reports this past summer of walnut husk fly infesting walnuts. This critter is about the size of a housefly and about as welcome. They are a colorful lot and can be identified by a yellow spot just below where the wings are attached and a dark triangular band at the tip of each wing. They only produce one generation a year. The pupae over winter in the soil and emerge as adult flies in early July around the middle of August. Mating occurs for the first eight days after emergence, and then the female starts depositing eggs in groups of about fifteen beneath the walnut husk. The eggs hatch out in about five days as little white maggots. As they get older their color changes to yellow with black mouthparts. These maggots feed on the husks for about five weeks, and then drop to ground and bury themselves several inches under the soil to pupate. Then the cycle starts over again.

The damage these pests do is mainly done by the maggots. They feed on the inside of the husks turning them black and soft. The outer part of the husk usually remains intact, but the fleshy parts rot or decay and stain the nut shell and these stains cannot be removed even with bleach. They can also cause shriveled and darkened kernels or they can even cause mold in the nuts.

Black walnuts are the walnut husk fly's favorite host. Therefore, we should remove or at least treat abandoned or roadside walnut trees. Be sure to rake up and destroy the infected nuts lying on the ground. Do not put them into a compost pile. Either burn or bag them in plastic and get rid of the debris. In other words, destroy them.

The recommended trap to use on the walnut husk fly is the Pherocon AM trap which was actually developed for use against the apple maggot, which is closely related to the husk fly. This trap is yellow rectangular cardboard coated with a mixture of ammonium acetate and protein hydrolysate. These attract the flies and an added sticky substance traps them on the card. You will need to clean or replace the traps once a week. Set out your traps around the first part of July in a shaded part of the tree about 6 feet off the ground.

As far as a chemical control, remember that control is directed against the adult husk fly to prevent their egg laying. Timing is important and a second application maybe needed. You can use malathion EC or malathion EC + Staley's Bait No. 7. Malathion can also be added to molasses and applied to the lower parts of the tree at three-week intervals starting in July. It is recommended to use one to one and a half times as much molasses as malathion. In order to get control of this pest you must be persistent with whatever method you choose to use. Good Luck!

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.