

The County Agent's Corner

with TJ Cummings

They say you should try to learn something new every day. Well, I did last week, there is actually a bug that eats only mesquite trees!

The cool, wet weather we have had created a perfect storm for these bugs, generating a lot of questions and concerns over the last couple of weeks across the area. What we are seeing is near to total defoliation of large mesquites, while the younger small ones have little to no damage at all. When looking for what caused the damage, no bugs are left in the tree or on the ground nearby, just leaves stripped right down to the midrib.

Come to find out, we have a Mesquite Cutworm invasion. I didn't know there was such a thing. They are dark, nearly black, and may have a few lighter colored spots and up to about 2 inches long. After they strip the leaves from the mesquite, they drop to the ground and burrow in where they mutate into a moth emerging later in the fall or next spring starting the cycle over again. The worm feeds during the cool part of the day and at night which makes them harder to spot.

Before we get all excited and think we will be mesquite free within a few cycles, there is "the rest of the story". Most healthy mesquites will survive the defoliation and put on new leaves this year. The exception is older diseased trees and maybe some that took the big February freeze pretty bad may not survive the attack. One other consideration is if you were planning to do a foliar herbicide spray to kill mesquite this year, you may want to wait until next year now. Since there are no leaves to move the herbicide throughout the tree, the herbicide will be ineffective and by the time new leaves are developed, the optimum spray time will likely have passed for this summer. Now for those with mesquite you want to save, any pesticide labeled for caterpillars will knock them out quickly. The trick is getting it on early and staying on top of them for a time. The good news is we don't have to worry about them going hungry in Eastland County!

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Till next time, ya'll have a good day

TJ