

No remedy in sight

Borer Marches on Area Eucalyptus

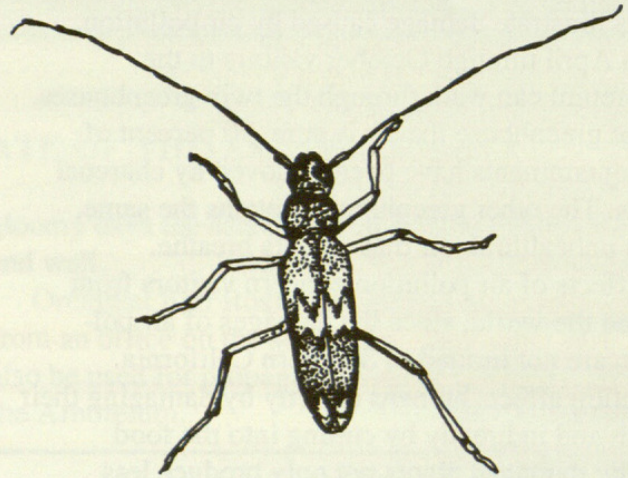
Although the deadly eucalyptus longhorned borer (*Phoracantha semipunctata*) continues to spread throughout California, eucalypts at the county gardens have not been affected so far. The borer has been found in the communities of Arcadia, Claremont and Palos Verdes, so good cultural practices, not isolation, may be what protects the gardens' trees.

Eucalypts offer so many essential qualities for the local landscape that it's worth investigating what has been learned about the beetle since it invaded the state about eight years ago.

First, it's probably a mistake to hope some "magic bullet" such as a biological or chemical control will be developed soon. Second, because the adult borer travels up to nine miles in one flight, it can evade quarantines. It's a pest all local gardeners will have to deal with; no areas are immune.

What do we know about the outlook for eucalyptus in California?

The triggering factor in borer infestation seems to be stress, whether from drought or pruning or root disturbance. Vigorous eucalypts can usually drown borers by producing a gush of



Phoracantha semipunctata (twice lifesize)

sap that floods the insects' tunnels. Senior Deputy Forester Herb Spitzer said that, among thousands of infested eucalypts he has examined in Los Angeles County, he has yet to see a well maintained landscape specimen succumb to borer attack.

So the essential defensive tactic seems to be reducing stress on the trees. How? Most important is to water the trees properly. This means deep watering beyond the dripline about once a month. Avoid disturbing the root zone when grading near established trees. Young trees also seem to be less susceptible.

To reduce stressful pruning, choose new eucalyptus plantings that will remain in scale with the landscape when mature. Since eucalypts may grow several feet each year, a young tree will soon need annual pruning if a too-large species was selected in the first place.

Several small *Eucalyptus* species are being evaluated at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum as possible replacements if or when the susceptible *E. globulus* and *E. viminalis* fall to the borer. This issue of the newsletter carries a description of four recently imported species that even with the grim borer prognosis may keep the familiar eucalyptus family a part of the California landscape.



Eucalyptus borer tunnels may girdle the trunk, eventually killing the tree.



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