

Welcome to New Readers from Fall 2016 Horticulture Classes

I'd like to welcome those who have joined our mailing list as a result of our fall horticulture classes. I encourage you to take advantage of the services and knowledge available through UC Cooperative Extension.

Redhumped Caterpillar

In autumn, usually later October and early November, the redhumped caterpillar reaches its greatest numbers and may be seen as a nuisance pest, especially of liquidambar (*L. styraciflua*) (sweetgum) trees. Insect feeding does not result in long-term injury to trees.

The adult of the redhumped larva is an inconspicuous moth. Like all moths, the insect goes through a four-part lifecycle. The female moth lays eggs, which hatch into small larvae, which molt and increase in size, until they may be 1-1½ inches long. The larvae eventually develop the distinctive red head capsule. At first, the larvae only eat a layer of the leaf, but as they grow they eat the entire leaf. Their preferred food in the Bakersfield area is liquidambar leaves. When feeding is complete, the larvae drop to the ground and spin a cocoon, from which the adults emerge to start the cycle again. There are four generations of this insect in the Bakersfield area, each more numerous than the previous, so in most years larvae may be seen in large numbers dropping out of liquidambar trees just before leaf fall in October.



Several natural enemies attack redhumped caterpillar, including parasitic wasps, and general predators such as spiders and lacewings. It is possible to treat trees for this insect, but by the time the larvae are obvious they are difficult to kill, and the large size of many liquidambar trees makes treatment via an insecticide spray difficult. For high-value trees, it is possible to treat with a product containing the biological agent *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) (sold under several trade names). Bt is considered an organic control, but good leaf coverage is needed since this material is effective after being eaten by the larvae. Bt is much more effective against small larvae than those at later stages of development, so if treatment is desired, it's best to watch for the small larvae and catch a generation at its beginning. For tall trees, this may not be possible, another reason treatment is often impractical. Systemic insecticides would have to be applied in large amounts for control, and are not recommended.

Fortunately, redhumped caterpillars, although a nuisance, do not cause long-term harm to trees. Leaves have mostly finished their work of photosynthesis in later autumn, and feeding of the insect merely advances leaf loss by a few weeks.

For more information, please see the Pest Note on redhumped caterpillar found at the UC IPM website at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu.

Tips for Selecting an Arborist

Although we may have the tools to prune smaller trees, for pruning of larger trees it may be advisable or necessary to hire an arborist. I often receive calls asking for a recommendation of specific companies or individuals. While I don't offer such recommendations, here are a few tips that can help you find the expertise you need. Since the basic entry requirements for tree work are a pickup truck, a chain saw and a business card, it is no surprise the backgrounds and skill of arborists vary.

- ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) certification is an indication that an individual arborist has passed a test covering knowledge of tree care.
- Can you communicate clearly with the potential arborist about the tree work you want? The more specific you can be, the easier it is to see whether the potential arborist is competent and the greater the likelihood you will obtain what you want. Does he or she seem to understand and is able to repeat your request?
- Does the arborist know the common name of your tree?
- Can the arborist explain how your tree will respond to pruning?
- Does the arborist have proper safety equipment? As a rule of thumb, if a tree is big enough to climb, it is big enough to tie into. Chain saws and ladders are a bad combination. (It is astonishing how often one sees workers in trees without any sort of safety harness.)
- What about insurance?
- What about a landscape contractor's license?
- Of course, you can ask for references for other work that has been done.

Based on experiences of Kern residents, I think the homeowner should be present while tree work is being done. If things don't seem to be going well, one should be prepared to stop the work, pay for what has been done, and get someone else to finish the job.

Horticultural Tour 2017: Iceland

Please consider joining our group for a visit to Iceland, July 15-22, 2017. From what I know of Iceland, I expect the landscape to be somewhere between scenic and spectacular.



Why Iceland? Plants growing outdoors in the far north have adaptations to conserve water, since the root ball may be frozen for several months. Such adaptations are similar in many instances to those found in plants of arid areas. Because of its location on the mid-Atlantic rift, Iceland was built by volcanoes and is the world's leader in use of geothermal



energy for greenhouse production. That location also makes Iceland one of the few places where one can stand on land where Earth's crust is being formed. As a bonus, for those of us who live in Kern County, July is usually quite warm locally. In contrast, we can expect Iceland to have delightfully cool weather.

What I want to do is form a group now so we have space reserved with the tour operator in Iceland. I will indicate my interest via a deposit, and you can, too. The details for this visit are

found in a .pdf that I can send you by email, or please find at

http://travelgallery.com/images/Hort_Itinerary_2017_ver_2.pdf

Please contact me if questions, jfkarlik@ucdavis.edu or 661 868-6220.

Future Classes

I plan to offer Horticulture V in the spring of 2017 beginning February. I think it is now possible to mark it on your calendar if you're interested, although I have not decided what day of the week to offer it. The class should be fun and interesting, since horticulture is fun and interesting.

John Karlik

Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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