



Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains

Oak Q&A

Oak Issues of Summer 2023

Rosi Dagit, Certified Arborist

8.1.23

Our coast live oaks were overjoyed to receive nearly 50 inches of rain in Topanga this winter, producing new shoots and burgeoning with an abundance of new leaves! While that lovely new growth is providing lots of additional energy for the tree the bounty also comes with potential problems. If you've observed any of the issues **bolded** below, please review the potential causes before taking drastic measures.

What is that white powder covering many new shoots?

Powdery mildew is common after a cool wet winter and spring. Caused by several fungi, the growth can cause leaf distortion and limit growth as they take nutrients from the newly formed leaves. The good news is that once the warm days turn hot, this fungus will disappear and does not cause lasting damage. No treatment is needed!



Why is all this sticky, gooey sap dropping down from my coast live oak tree?



The calls keep coming and folks are understandably concerned, especially when their car windshields are covered, but there is no simple answer and a site visit from a certified arborist is likely necessary to identify the source of the problem. There are over 5,000 native insects that rely on oaks to survive, and with the cool wet conditions we experienced this spring, a booming insect cycle is in full swing.

Everything from honeydew excreted from leaf sucking insects like aphids, to insects like filbert worms, filbert weevils or fruit tree leaf rollers could be the culprits. To confirm which insect is causing the problem, you can set a white sheet under the canopy and then hit the lower branches with soft end of a broom to see what falls out. Take a photo of those insects and contact an arborist to see if these insects may be presenting a problem.



Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains

Oak Q&A

Most of the time, these insect pest cycles are short-lived, and the trees have years of experience in coping, so treatments are not needed. The exception is for trees that are severely stressed by other issues resulting in the loss of functional leaf area, making it hard for the tree to survive.

What about those twigs throughout the tree that have turned brown?

Twig girdlers are having a tremendous summer enjoying the new growth on trees! These insects are sometimes referred to as “nature’s pruning team” and while the “flagging” of brown twigs is unsightly, these insects rarely cause any significant damage to the oaks. So, watch how they work to keep the canopy in balance and check out the interesting tunnels they make which disrupt transfer of water and nutrients to the shoots.

Be on the lookout for Bad Beetles!!!!

While most of our native insects are annoying, they rarely kill trees. That is not the case for Invasive Shot hole borers and Gold spotted oak borers.

Please keep an eye out for these harmful beetles as early detection and rapid response are key in preventing massive tree loss. The RCD will be hosting trainings in Fall 2023 to help community volunteers learn to identify these pests. Infestations are often spread by moving firewood cut from infested trees. Be careful NOT to move firewood, especially into national and state parks!

In the meantime, you can learn more at:

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/pshb/>

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/gsoinfo/>

Our native coast live oaks are incredible survivors! Benign neglect is often the best way to ensure that they continue to grow and thrive. So, avoid removing green leaves (which produce the food for the tree), protect tree roots and enjoy the wonder of our leafy neighbors!