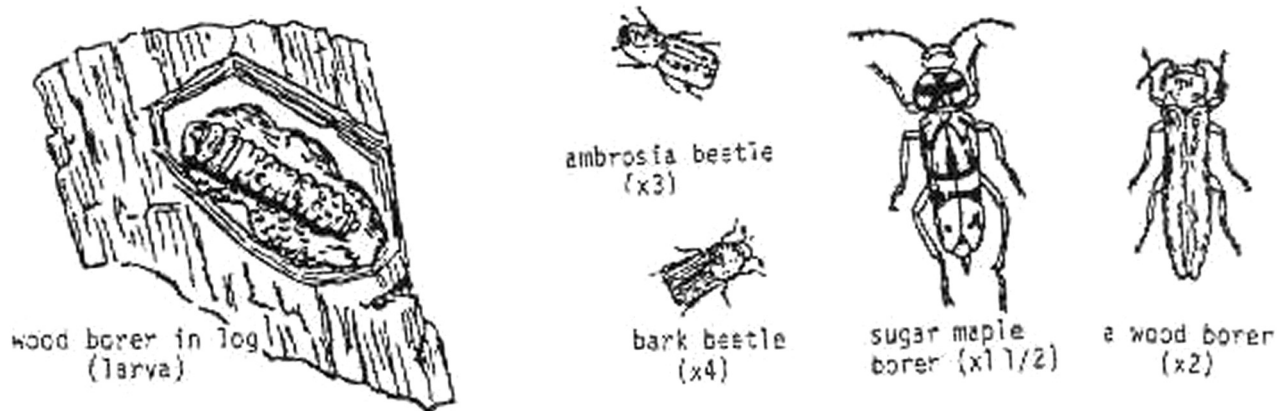


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Insects and Firewood, Some Facts...



With increased interest in the use of wood as a home-heating fuel, many people are beginning to notice the insects that periodically emerge from firewood.

Do the insects cause any damage to firewood? While firewood is not damaged and may still burn efficiently if infested with insects, precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of certain invasive pests that may be transported in wood (see below). Infested wood may appear normal, but may harbor insects inside. In most cases, if wood is seasoned properly, it will dry before our native insects can complete their development, and they will not survive.

Will firewood insects attack wood in the house? For the most part, these insects are only nuisance pests in the house. However, if the house has the correct conditions for an insect infestation, firewood could be the source of damaging insects. One example might be carpenter ants. If one brings in wood infested with carpenter ants, and stores it in a basement or garage containing some wet structural wood perhaps already starting to decay, carpenter ants might establish a nest in the moist wood after the log dries out. This is an exceptional case, rather than the rule.

Should I spray logs to avoid insect pests? We **do not** recommend spraying firewood for any reason. Insect pests can be reduced by proper cutting and storage.

Which insects attack firewood? There are three main groups of insects that can damage wood (see illustration above). They are bark beetles, ambrosia beetles and wood borers. Bark beetles burrow between the bark and sapwood. Ambrosia beetles bore through the bark and into the sapwood and/or heartwood, while wood borers can be found either between the wood and bark, or in the heartwood or sapwood.

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Special precautions with respect to the Asian Longhorned Beetle and other emerging threats: With the appearance of the Asian Longhorned beetle in the New York metropolitan area, extreme caution must be taken when transporting wood products (including firewood). Wood may not be moved across quarantine lines without a certificate of compliance – make sure you know where quarantine areas are so you do not cross quarantine lines with firewood. If you move wood from an infested and quarantined area, you could be spreading the Asian Longhorned Beetle and you will also be subject to an extremely hefty fine. Other emerging insect and plant disease threats may also be transported in firewood. Call the Cornell Cooperative Extension Diagnostic Lab for further information. Information on quarantine issues is also available at the USDA Pest Detection and Management Program web site <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/ep/index.html>

When are insects active? Most insect activity occurs during the growing season – from April to October in New York State. During this time adult beetles are actively looking for suitable wood on which to lay their eggs. From November to March, insects hibernate, and few, if any, adults are present.

Bark beetles and ambrosia beetles are active during the entire growing season. These insects may have five or more generations during this time, depending on climate. With the wood borers, activities are usually more restricted – often to a certain few weeks of adult activity. In order to determine the periods of activity, you will have to know what type of wood you will be cutting and learn the activity cycles of the associated pests.

What can I do to avoid large numbers of insects? Cutting firewood at the right time of year (during the dormant season) will help reduce the number of pests. Pile logs soon after they are cut, either off the ground or under cover. The inner bark must dry rapidly and thoroughly before the beetles begin to fly in the spring. If logs are cut during the growing season, remove them from the forest as soon as possible. Even a few days exposure when insects are active may be enough time for an infestation to begin.

How should I store firewood? Firewood should be stored outdoors, under cover and in a convenient place, away from the building to discourage termite activity near the structure. This way, firewood insects are also kept outside and dirt problems are reduced. Bring wood inside as it is used.

Store wood under cover to keep it dry – storage places might be a woodshed, unheated unattached garage or utility building, or under a sheet of plastic or sheet-metal roofing. Be certain to keep an air space between the wood and any covering.

If wood is dried quickly, few insects are likely to survive. The greater the surface area of wood exposed, the more rapid the drying. Stacking wood in loose piles raised off the ground as well as splitting or sawing will accelerate drying. This is especially necessary with logs greater than eight inches in diameter or longer than four feet.

Firewood placed in an open area will dry rapidly and remain sound. Put a cover over the top tier of wood. Clear plastic sheeting can be used. Temperatures under the plastic covering will rise higher than outside, warming the wood and evaporating the moisture within. To prevent condensation of water vapor under the cover, some arrangement for ventilation is necessary.

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