ASH FLOWER GALL MITES

Persistent brown to blackish cankerous masses noticed on certain ash *(Fraxinus species)* trees result from ash-flower gall mites *(Eriophyes fraxiniflora)* attacking the male (staminate) flowers.

Most ash trees are dioecious – a single tree will contain only male (staminate) flowers or female (pistillate) flowers. Very rarely will both types of flowers be found on the same tree. The ash-flower gall mites attack the male trees during blossom development in the spring. These tiny mites feed on the blooms, resulting in the formation of galls. These galls, which are large, blackened, abnormal masses, and very unsightly, persist on trees often in excess of a year.

The health and vigor of flower gall mite infested trees does not appear to be affected to any great extent. Only in a few extreme cases, which when combined with other environmental stress situations, does the ash tree suffer or die. The major criticism of the gall masses is the unsightly appearance they impart to boulevards or yards.

Recommendations for control include planting only female trees and planting a mix of tree species.

For already established trees, dormant oil sprays seem to be an effective control. These are light grade oils, emulsifiable in water and may be acquired through local garden centers. The dormant oil should be applied in late winter or early spring before the tree releafs. Chemical insecticides, such as Malathion®, may also be effective in controlling this pest but spray time would be critical. Spray would have to be applied when the blossoms begin to form in the spring.

Once galls have been formed some measure of control and reduction of the unsightliness can be achieved by pruning and destroying the affected masses as soon as possible after the infection. This type of pruning is most feasible where only one or a few smaller trees are affected but is rarely feasible on a large scale.