

Now What's Happening to My White Oaks?

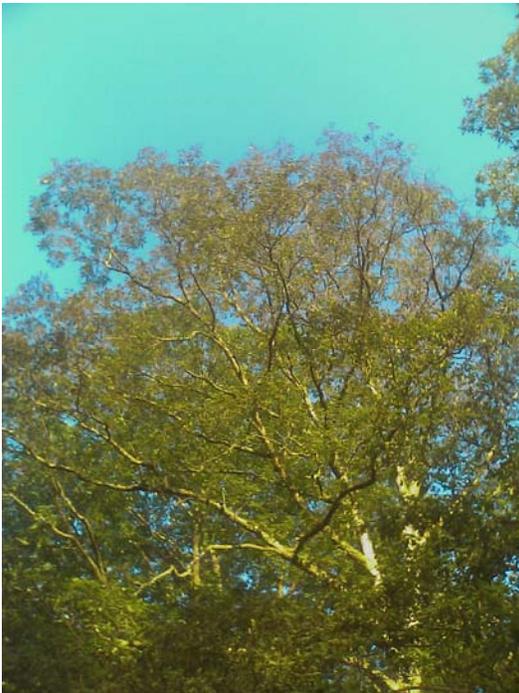
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A small wasp is wreaking havoc on the white oaks this year in southern Ohio. What we are observing is referred to as the Jumping Oak Gall, caused by the small gall wasp, *Neuroterus saltatorius*. This wasp has two generations per year. Found on the underside of leaves, each of the tiny circular seed-like galls contains a single larva. When mature, the gall containing the larva drops to the ground and the “jumping” begins. The insect’s activity inside the gall actually makes the gall jump a few centimeters off the ground. Some folks speculate that this activity helps the insect burrow down more easily into the soil to overwinter. Female wasps emerge in the spring from galls on the ground and lay eggs in emerging buds. After several weeks, small blister-like galls form on the young leaves.

This year, the ODNR Division of Forestry’s aerial forest health survey indicated large areas of discolored trees in several southern Ohio counties. The timing matched the numerous phone calls the Division of Forestry was receiving. Although there are many maladies affecting white oak, the Jumping Oak Gall does seem fairly widespread, and this is the second year of infestation in some areas. So far, there are verified reports of discoloration on white oaks in Hocking, Ross, Lawrence, Jackson, Scioto, and Gallia counties. West Virginia has confirmed ten counties with gall wasp damage. Indiana has experienced several outbreaks since 1999. Missouri reported high population of the Jumping Oak Gall wasp this spring.

So, what might this mean for our white oaks and other species in the white oak group? It is reported that there are over 700 different gall-making wasps found on oaks, many of which cause cosmetic damage. With the Jumping Oak Gall wasp, when populations are high, the leaves turn brown and discolored, and defoliation can occur. Repeated infestations combined with other stressors could result in weakening the tree. If defoliation occurs, trees may put out a second set of leaves. Outbreaks typically last for one or two years and then fade away as natural controls reduce the gall wasp numbers again.



For yard or landscape trees, watering during dry spells is recommended. To prevent recurrence next year, properly-timed insecticide treatments for the first generation the following spring may help to protect valuable yard trees. Always follow the label when using pesticides and consult with a professional.

In the forest, there is no management treatment recommended. Tree mortality is not expected unless the tree is experiencing other stressors. It is not necessary to harvest your oaks just because you have this gall. Consult a professional forester if you have any questions.

Editor's note: for more information on forest health pests and diseases, visit these web sites:

<http://www.ohiodnr.com/>

<http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/plant/plant.aspx>

<http://ashalert.osu.edu/default.asp>

<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/>

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>