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## Invasion of the Beetles!

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There is new exotic insect pest threatening some of our native and ornamental trees and it's not a rock and roll band; it is the redbay ambrosia beetle (*Xyleborus glabratus*). This beetle was first discovered in southeast Georgia in 2002. Since then it has established a range from Charleston, SC to St. Johns County, FL. Fortunately, it hasn't found its way to Brevard County, but be on the lookout for this sneaky, fast traveling exotic because it is working its way down the coast.



Figure 1. Photo by Michael C. Thomas, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

The preferred host plants for the redbay ambrosia beetle include redbay (*Persea borbonia*) and sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). The redbay ambrosia beetle doesn't actually feed on the wood, but it is a vector for a vascular wilt pathogen (*Ophiostoma* sp.) that does kill the plant.

The beetle is very small (about 2 mm in length) and looks very similar to other ambrosia beetles found in Florida (Figure 1). Positive identification is best made by a specialist, but there are some host plant symptoms to be on the look out for:

- External symptoms are not evident immediately
- Small strings of sawdust may protrude from the bark, but they are fragile and may not always be apparent (Figure 2)
- Shotholes and a dark stain may exist under the bark at the point of attack
- Wilted foliage with a reddish or purplish discoloration will be exhibited throughout the entire crown
- The foliage eventually turns brown and does not fall from the tree
- The tree begins to die and other species of ambrosia beetles may move in

This insect is proving to be a very serious pest of redbay trees. Within nine months, the mortality rate of redbays in the vicinity where it was first detected in Florida has increased from 10% to 60%. The berries produced by redbays are a major food source for many types of wildlife including



Figure 2. Photo by James Johnson, Georgia Forestry Commission

songbirds, wild turkeys, quail, deer, and black bears. The larvae of Palamedes swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio palamedes*) feed primarily on redbay, so these insects may be negatively impacted by the spread of this insect as well.

To date there are no recommendations for managing this potentially devastating pest. Dead redbay trees should be mulched or chipped and not transported out of the area in which they were found. Redbay firewood should also not be transported.

Source: The Redbay Ambrosia Beetle, *Xyleborus glabratus* Eichhoff (Scolytinae: Curculionidae), The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services available at <http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/enpp/ento/x.glabratus.html>.