Protect trees and fruit from peach tree borer

Gardeners who grow fruit and vegetables in their landscapes are sure to tell you there’s nothing more tasty than fresh-picked produce. They work hard to protect their crops from insects.

For those gardeners who are growing peaches, they really need to be diligently protecting not only the fruit, but the trees, too. The greater peach tree borer, which is native to North America, can wreak havoc on peach trees. Other hosts include nectarine, apricot, plum, prune, cherry and chokecherry.

The greater peach tree borer is a clear winged moth that lays eggs on the trunk of the tree near the soil line. The eggs hatch and the larvae tunnel into the trunk feeding on the cambium and inner bark. This will cause damage to large trees, and in cases of severe larval feeding, can girdle and kill trees.

Unfortunately, these borers are common in Oklahoma and can overwinter under the bark or below ground level on peaches, wild plum, cherry and other related plants. When temperatures reach 50 degrees, the larvae become active and pupate. The moths usually emerge in mid-May and continue through early June.

Females don’t waste any time and begin laying eggs almost immediately. One moth can lay anywhere between 200 and 600 eggs during her short life. About nine to 15 days later, the eggs hatch and the larvae begin feeding on the trunks.

Greater peach tree borer must be controlled each year starting with the year the trees are planted. This must continue for the life of the tree. For homegrowers with only one to two trees, simply locate the larvae at the base of the tree and use a knife or flexible wire to remove the insects. Avoid any mechanical injury to the tree trunks (mowers, weedeaters, etc.); this attracts adult borers.

For chemical control by homeowners, there are few options that can be purchased that are labeled for peach tree borer. Preventative sprays work best. To be effective as a preventive spray, the insecticide must have some residual activity, allowing it to kill young peachtree borer larvae emerging from eggs for several weeks after application. Presently certain formulations containing the active ingredients permethrin or carbaryl are the only insecticides that can legally be used on backyard fruit trees, have reasonably good residual activity on bark after application, and are labeled for control of peachtree borer. Check with your local garden center for insecticides designed for the home gardeners. Peach tree and peach tree borer must both be on
the label to make it legal to apply for the control of the pest. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on when and how to make the applications properly.