

NEWS RELEASE
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BIOLOGICAL PEST CONTROL PROJECT

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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Although eucalyptus trees are found in relatively few sites in Mariposa County, most are infected with a serious insect. Called the redgum lerp psyllid, this relative of whitefly and aphid has caused damage to eucalyptus trees throughout California. High psyllid populations, common in several areas of Mariposa, can cause severe leaf drop. This can weaken trees and increase their susceptibility to other pests such as wood boring beetles.

This psyllid is native to Australia, the source of its name. In the native aboriginal language, “lerp” means “cap.” This insect, while feeding on plant sap, secretes a crystallized honeydew coating that covers the psyllid.

Research looking to control the redgum lerp psyllid has been conducted for several years. Unfortunately, most chemical treatments are not very effective. More recently, a group of University of California scientists traveled to sites in Australia with native groves of eucalyptus. Their goal was to find a biological control, natural enemy, of the lerp psyllid.

The result of this research was a tiny, non-stinging parasitic wasp, *Psyllaephagus bliteum*. After a year of testing and production, U. C. and California Department of Food and Agriculture scientists have begun releasing the parasite in each county. In early August, Mariposa County received its allocation.

Sites selected by the County Agricultural Commissioner’s office and the U. C. Master Gardeners had at least 20 eucalyptus trees, most with heavy psyllid infestation. The wasps will

lay eggs under the lerp cap into the psyllid. The wasp larvae will use the psyllid as a food source until maturity. The parasitic wasp will then drill a small hole out of the lerp and start the cycle over on other lerp psyllids. If this release is successful, Mariposa County will become a nursery site for the beneficial parasitic wasps. Within a year, we may be able to make further releases from our pilot sites.

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Jim Johnson, U.C. Master Gardener, releases beneficial insects.



Redgum Lerp Psyllid