

Final Project Report to the NYS IPM Program, Agricultural IPM 2000 – 2001

Title: *BRANCHING OUT - An Integrated Pest Management
Newsletter for Trees and Shrubs*

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Type of grant: Public Education

Project location(s): Ithaca

Abstract:

Eleven issues of Volume 8 of *Branching Out - An Integrated Pest Management Newsletter for Trees and Shrubs* were published in 2001. The newsletter was sent to 712 subscribers and an additional 80 cooperators. Readers received timely information for identifying and managing a wide array of insect and disease problems on trees and shrubs. With this the first year of implementation of the New York State Neighbor Notification Law for pesticide applicators on Long Island and in several upstate counties, timely information about pests and pest management options was especially valuable.

Background and justification:

During the growing season, tree health managers are in constant need of up-to-date information on the occurrence and distribution of potentially damaging insect and disease pests. They also need to know what management options are open to them in the event that intervention is needed. Inasmuch as the need for this information comes at a time when most managers are working 14-16 hour days just to accommodate the needs of their clients, they would most benefit from an instrument that speaks directly to their concerns without the distraction of advertisements and other extraneous information.

In 1994, we sought to improve communication with the tree care industry through publication of a bi-weekly newsletter, *Branching Out*. A total of 250 people paid \$30 each to receive the newsletter and their subscriptions together with departmental funds, a grant from the NYS Arborists' Association, and 18 \$250 gifts from arboricultural firms throughout the state allowed us to continue for a second year. Reactions to the content, scope, and timeliness of the newsletter were very positive.

By 2000, paid subscriptions had risen to 715 and for future planning, 700 seems to represent a (hopefully temporary) plateau as our subscription numbers have been in that range for about 4

years. In addition, gratis copies continue to be sent to Cornell Cooperative Extension staff, and to relevant Cornell faculty.

Each year, the presentation of *Branching Out* changes a bit as improved technology allows us to present a higher quality product and as subscribers bring suggestions for changes to our attention. Our biggest and most costly change is the inclusion of color photos in virtually every issue. The color is limited to a single page and we expect to continue to limit ourselves to that page, but printing costs are a bit higher nonetheless.

Objectives:

Branching Out is intended to enable tree care professionals to reduce pesticide use and maximize efficacy of applications that are made by:

1. Improving pest identification and appraisal via feature articles with color and B/W photos, line drawings, and verbal descriptions,
2. Maximizing timing for scouting and management activities via reporting of our own scouting report,
3. Offering a forum for public dialogue between scientists and pest managers via question and answer sections and regional reports by CCE educators and IPM specialists,
4. Providing a formal, annual published record of insect and disease occurrence in New York State.
5. With this upcoming 8th year of publication, we propose to conduct an in depth survey of 100 randomly selected readers to find how *Branching Out* might be better designed to meet their needs. Items such as layout, content, timeliness, and WWW access will be queried.

Procedures:

Objectives 1-4. Each issue of *Branching Out* is comprised of at least five sections which taken together are intended to achieve the objectives stated above. A Scouting Report, Growing Degree Day and Phenology records, a Feature Article in which issues related to identification and/or management concepts are presented, two Regional Reports, and a Miscellany section for presentation of important issues not covered in previous sections seem to meet the needs of the audience. Occasionally, questions submitted by readers or generated by our staff to reflect issues raised in personal visits or phone calls are also answered

The Scouting Report and Phenological Records are generated during bi-weekly scouting trips to most important horticultural areas in the state and after consultation with CCE staff. Growing degree days are from published data and from measurements taken at county sites. Feature Articles are prepared in advance from contemporary literature and staff experience. Regional Reports are written by county-based CCE staff and may reflect existing situations or be of a philosophical nature. Information for Miscellany comes from many different sources. *Branching Out* also serves as a vehicle for dissemination of 2(ee) labels for several important pests. Subscribers receive the appended labels immediately within - at most - two weeks of publication, and they could proceed to implement the expanded uses soon thereafter. Line drawings and photographs have been used to great effectiveness to supplement text and more are planned. *Branching Out* is also posted on the World Wide Web with access limited to paid subscribers.

Objective 5. A questionnaire designed to get some better idea of readers reactions to *Branching Out* will be distributed to 100 randomly selected readers with hopes of a 30% response.

Results and discussion:

Branching Out was published bi-weekly from mid-April through mid-July and tri-weekly from July through September for a total of 11 issues in the 2001 season.

Each issue contained a scouting report - comprised of results of our ownscouting in sites from Farmingdale, Long Island to Rochester together with reports from county Cooperative Extension agents, Cornell's Insect and Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, and knowledgeable tree care professionals throughout the state. We also reported growing degree days and phenological observations and chose one pest or group of pests for the subject of an in-depth feature article. We also invited submission of regional reports prepared by Cornell Cooperative Extension educators and members of the IPM program staff and published 19 such reports during the season. Occasionally, an item that we thought was especially important for our readers to know about was published under our "Miscellany" category.

In 2001, *Branching Out* subscribers were especially well-prepared to deal with conventional insect and disease pests of landscape plants as well as unexpected death of a wide array of established landscape trees and shrubs. In the case of the latter, we were able to dissuade tree care professionals from treating declining trees as if they were affected by Verticillium wilt - which they definitely were not. The year was also marked by alternating periods of very dry, then very wet weather so that even though average precipitation for the year was near normal, there were long periods of significant drought. In addition to direct effects on plants, the weather either delayed or accelerated the appearance of many insect pests. Our conscientious scouting program made us aware of the aberrations and enabled us to share that information with practitioners who were trying to keep up in the field.

In our feature articles, we highlighted the following additional topics:

- Distinguishing Asian longhorned beetles from whitespotted sawyers
- Balsam twig aphids
- Beech cankers
- Bleeding cankers
- Galls, burls, and buds
- Introduced pests of the past; where are they?
- Microinjection as a pest management tool
- Roundheaded apple tree borer
- Spiny caterpillars
- Systemic acquired resistance - disease management for the future is now!.

Volume 9 will be published in 2002.

References: (if applicable)