

# Gobs of gall mites

Though Maple Gall Mites can be pesky and invasive, damage they cause is mostly cosmetic



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**Mites inject their saliva into the emerging leaf as they feed which acts as a plant growth regulator, causing the cells to enlarge abnormally. This forms the gall that gradually encloses the mite.**

**Q**uestion: My silver maple is starting to drop its leaves. As I was raking them up, I noticed that many of the yellow leaves are covered with all these little red or black bumps on the upper surfaces. Then I looked up and saw that the whole tree seemed to have the same raised areas on most of its leaves. What is causing these bumps and should I be concerned?

**A**nsWER: Silver maple trees, as well as some red maples, are very susceptible to these weird leaf deformities created by the maple gall mite, *Vasates quadripedes*. These tiny eriophyid mites are less than 2 mm long, too small to see with the naked eye.

The galls are first red, then turn green and finally black, fastened to the upper surface of the leaf singly or in clusters so numerous that they seem to cover the whole leaf. Leaves that are severely infested with galls tend to fall prematurely. The galls can't be removed from the leaves since they are composed of

plant tissue, thus actually part of the leaf.

The adult mites become active in early spring, just as the buds begin to open. They inject their saliva into the emerging leaf as they feed which acts as a plant growth regulator, causing the cells to enlarge abnormally. This forms the gall that gradually encloses the mite and not only provides nutrients to the mite, but protects it from natural enemies, including any pesticides.

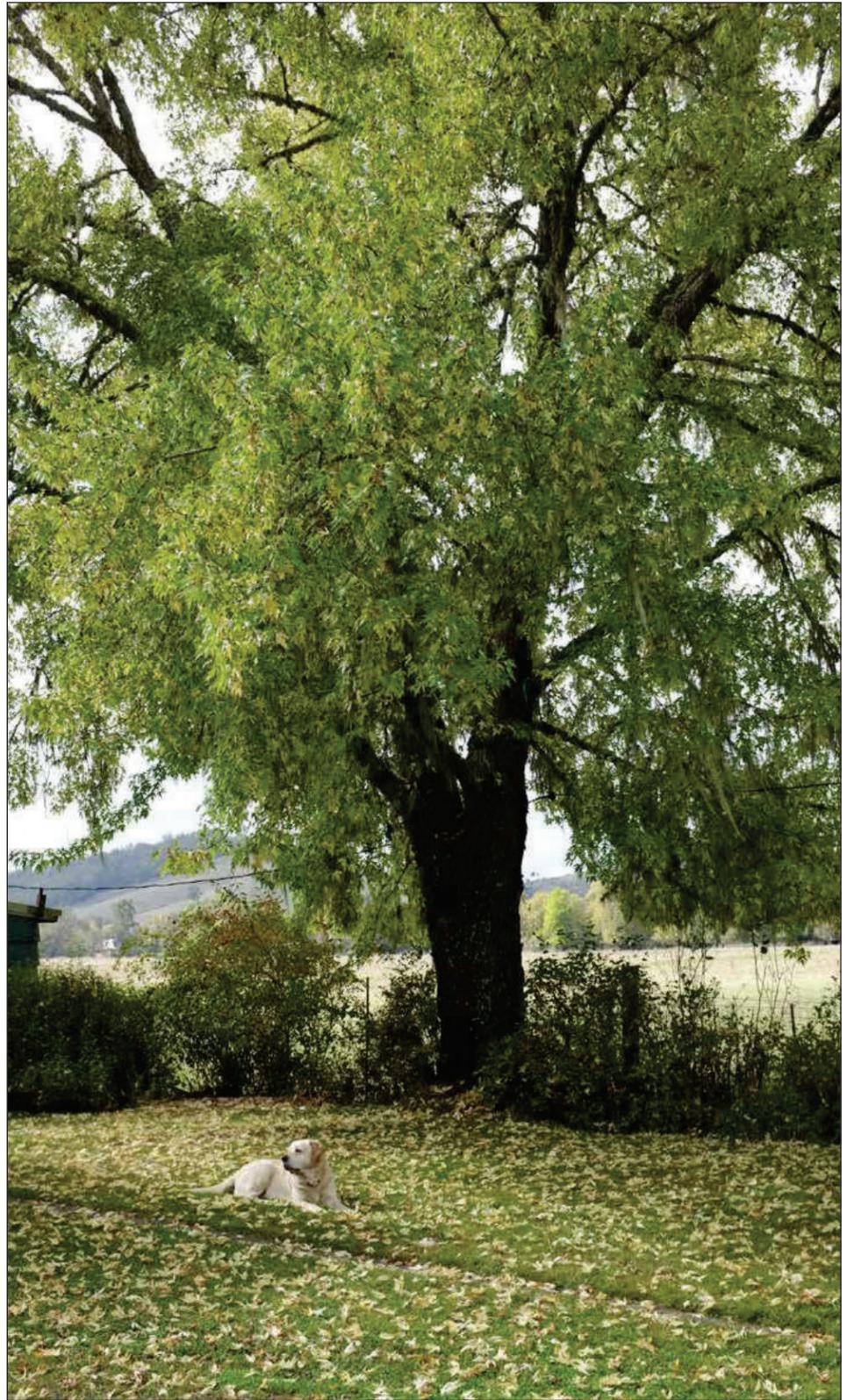
Once the leaf has reached its full size, the mite will lay numerous eggs within the gall, then die. The eggs then hatch into carrot-shaped nymphs with two pairs of legs. The nymphs stay inside the gall, feeding on gall tissue until developing into mature adults. At that stage, they exit the gall on the leaf underside

to crawl to other developing leaves to begin the cycle again.

One season can see several generations of mites.

By early summer, unable to stimulate any more gall growth, the mites migrate to the trunk and branches to overwinter in rough areas of the bark or other protected places. Infestations can vary greatly year to year. Fortunately the mites feed on specific host plants and do not spread to other non-maple trees or landscape plants.

Damage by the maple gall mite is mostly just cosmetic and doesn't harm the tree itself, therefore control is generally not recommended on established trees. However, if you have a young silver maple, a heavy infestation could weaken and stress



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**Silver maple trees are very susceptible to leaf deformities created by the maple gall mite.**

the tree. For a young tree, you can handpick the leaves with galls in order to reduce mite populations.

Again, once the galls have formed, the mites are protected, so sprays are ineffective.

For extreme infestations of young trees, preventative treatments in very early spring to target overwintering mites that have just begun to feed

on expanding leaves but haven't yet formed galls might reduce populations, but have a generally limited effect. Make an application to the lower leaf surface on a warm day in early spring when leaves are about 1/4 developed and then again 10 days later.

Dormant oil sprays can be effective if applied prior to bud break. Again, since pesticides have

limited impact, you might aim your efforts into good horticultural practices such as watering, fertilizing and mulching rather than spraying.

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*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.*