



ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Question of the Week: *My maple tree has straight rows of ¼" holes in it. Do I have some sort of insect that's causing damage? - C.G.*



Linda's Answer: The holes are being made by something called a "Yellow-bellied Sapsucker," a species of woodpecker that doesn't have a yellow belly and doesn't "suck" the sap! They do however, rely primarily on tree sap as their main food source and they get to it by drilling ¼" diameter holes (called "wells") into the tree. As the sap oozes into the wells, the sap-sucker uses its brush-like tongue to lap up it up. Hummingbirds and other birds and bats also use the sapsucker wells for feeding. Insects that are attracted to the sap also make up the sapsuckers menu. Sapsuckers have been observed to drill holes in over 1000 types of trees and woody shrubs, but they have a strong preference for trees with high sugar content in their sap. Their favorites include fruit trees (and their fruit), paper birch, beech, sugar maple, red maple, hickory and pines. You will often see tree sap running down the bark from sap-sucker wells and although this looks terrible, is generally doesn't cause the tree much of a problem. Trees can be threatened if the sapsucker damage is extensive with a large number of holes that go all the way around the tree. If you want to protect your tree during the months the sapsuckers are here, you can use a loose wrap of burlap or hardware cloth (metal mesh) around the area of the holes. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers are unique in that they are the only species of woodpecker that is truly migratory. They are here with us in the spring, summer and early fall and head south as far as Central America, Texas and the Bahamas in the late fall and winter. In addition, yellow-bellied sapsuckers are the only species of woodpecker that uses live trees for feeding. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers are classified as migratory non-game birds and are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act; it is against the law to kill or harm them.

"Ask the Landscape Professional" articles are all on our website; if you missed any, go to www.SprigsandTwigs.net

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Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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