

Are Your Hemlock Dying?

By Kitty Meyers, March 16, 2011

How are the beautiful big hemlock trees in your Atlanta backyard? Or those on your property in north Georgia, or perhaps in North Carolina?

Why do I ask? Because enormous numbers of eastern and Carolina hemlocks are dying or have already died on private property and in our national parks in the eastern part of the country from Atlanta to Maine. The cause is an Asian insect called the hemlock wooly adelgid, which has no natural predators in this geographical area.

Are your hemlocks infested?

There's an easy way to tell if your trees are infected. Look for small white woolly egg sacs on the underside of branches at least once a year from late fall through early summer.

Since the adelgid takes three to five years to kill a tree, you should have time to explore treatment options before the tree dies. The most reliable and cost-effective solution available to property owners is chemically treating the soil around their hemlocks with the chemical imidacloprid.



How you can help

Save Georgia's Hemlocks (SGH) in Dahlonega (www.savegeorgiashemlocks.org) is an excellent information and help source for property owners and those interested in planting hemlocks, especially the *Resources* section of the SGH web site.

Hemlocks are worth saving, not only because they're beautiful, but because they're vital in providing food and habitat for about 120 species of vertebrates and over 90 species of birds, shade for native plants, cool temperatures for trout streams, and protection for watersheds and water quality. In other words, if you or your church believes in earth care, you'll understand that saving the hemlocks is an environmental justice issue.



Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation (www.nwuuc.org) in Sandy Springs, winner of the Georgia Interfaith Power & Light 2008 Trailblazer Award, is leading the way. Its members have now planted 17 small hemlocks on its wooded 5-acres on Mount Vernon Highway (eleven obtained from SGH). The church is determined to keep these trees healthy, and see them mature and produce saplings of their own. Perhaps those saplings can someday be used, if the adelgid infestation dissipates, to restore the hemlock to north Georgia and our national forests.

So what can you do? Help spread the word to your friends and neighbors, to your church and fellow church members, and to other churches your church may be linked to. We can all help save the hemlocks by working together to keep them alive and by growing new trees, and thus help care for our earth.