

COASTAL GARDENER COLUMN

Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

Q: My neighbor has informed me that I need to remove my bottlebrush tree (*Callistemon melaleuca*) because it harbors termites. Is this true? Do I need to destroy my bottlebrush to help keep termites out of the neighborhood?

A: No, you do not! Bottlebrush trees (bushes) are not unique as a host for termites. Termites, both drywood and subterranean, will often infest the heartwood of trees and bushes. They usually gain access to the heartwood through pruning cuts, dead limbs, or broken limbs. I have seen termite infestations in living oak, ash, walnut, apple and apricot trees, and I am sure that if a search was done, termites could be found in many more species. The fences that surround many of our yards are made of cedar, pine, fir and other conifer species and are often infested with termites. Termites need access to “mature, untreated wood.” Almost any wood will do. Drywood termites even obtain the small amount of moisture they need from the wood they eat, so drywood termite infestations can be high in a tree, just like they can be up in the eaves or attic of your house. Subterranean termites must have access to wood and moisture, so these infestations usually are connected to the soil in one way or another.

Termite infestations in trees are usually of minor consequence, except that they serve as a source of termites which may infest your house or other structures when they swarm.

Therefore, you may wish to eliminate the colony of termites in your bottlebrush tree. If you can see where the termites are located in the plant, or there is an opening which allows access to the heartwood, simply treat that area with an insecticide. Use a pressure canister sprayer or garden sprayer to squirt the spray solution into the heartwood cavity. Any common garden insecticide, such as malathion, pyrethrin, carbaryl, isotox, etc., will kill termites. Use all plant protection products according to label directions for best results.

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Sept 5, 2007

Q: What can I spray in my yard to get rid of flies?

A: Flies come from maggots, and maggots must have a place to grow up. Such places can include areas where the soil is continuously moist and moss or algae are usually present. Dog manure can be a breeding site. Poorly managed compost piles are an excellent fly generator. Piles of rotting vegetation can also breed flies. If the above conditions exist in the neighbor's yard, you may not have any control over the fly situation. If you can clean up any of the above existing fly generators in your yard, do so. A properly managed compost pile should not breed flies.

If the existing flies tend to be in one area, use a yard and garden fogger to kill the existing adults. You should understand, however, that killing the adults is a very temporary measure. The only way to eliminate or greatly reduce the fly problem is to eliminate the breeding areas.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**