COLORADO BARK BEETLES

Homeowner identification, drought defense & next steps

A practical field guide from Above the Clouds Tree Services and Colorado Beetle and Forest Health. Educational draft — verify local conditions and treatment recommendations before publishing.



1 What to look for

Fresh popcorn-like pitch tubes on the trunk; reddish-brown boring dust in bark crevices or at the tree base; small entry holes; woodpecker activity; fading needles; and winding galleries under bark. Not every symptom proves a bark beetle infestation. Some successfully attacked trees stay green for months.

2 Which beetles matter

Mountain pine beetle commonly attacks larger pines. Ips engraver beetles may attack stressed trees, tops, and smaller-diameter material. Species, host tree, and local conditions change the best response. Photograph the trunk, crown, and any boring dust for identification.

3 Why drought matters

Trees use resin (pitch) as part of their natural defense against beetle attacks. Repeated drought can reduce vigor and compromise defenses. Deep watering during dry, unfrozen periods supports tree health, but does not guarantee protection against outbreaks or reverse a successful attack.

4 Fall and winter watering

When soil is unfrozen and air temperatures are above about 40°F, water slowly over the accessible root zone, including near and beyond the drip line. Water early enough to soak in before freezing. Avoid runoff and

waterlogged soil. Adjust for tree size, soil, slope, and local restrictions.

5 What to do if you suspect beetles

Take clear dated photographs of the whole tree, crown, pitch tubes, and boring dust. Avoid moving potentially infested firewood. Arrange identification and assessment promptly. Preventive bark treatments generally must be timed before attack; insecticide application after successful colonization will not rescue the tree.

6 Safety and the aftermath

Dead trees can develop falling-limb and failure hazards. Do not climb, fell, or work near power lines yourself. Ask a qualified tree professional to assess hazardous trees. Beetle-killed trees can contribute to local fuel and safety concerns, but wildfire behavior depends on many factors.

7 Free homeowner checklist

[ ] Inspect pines for pitch tubes and boring dust. [ ] Photograph changes. [ ] Water appropriately during dry, unfrozen periods. [ ] Keep firewood local. [ ] Request an assessment for suspected infestation. [ ] Keep a record of tree work and mitigation.

Trusted sources & further reading

Colorado State Forest Service — Mountain Pine Beetle

Colorado State University Extension — Mountain Pine Beetle

Colorado State University Extension — Fall and Winter Watering

Colorado State Forest Service — Forest Health Report

Request an assessment: Above the Clouds Tree Services • (719) 661-3011 • abovethecloudstrees.com