

# Hungry Pests Have Your City's Trees on Their Menu ... USDA Wants to Ruin their Dinner Plans

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Images Courtesy USDA APHIS



The Hungry Pests website and PSA employ a computer-generated creature, "Vin Vasive," made up entirely of invasive pests that fly and twitch as "Vin" moves and talks.

**Municipal arborists know** many of them by name. Emerald ash borer. Asian longhorned beetle. Gypsy moth. Sudden oak death. Whether beetle, moth, or disease-causing microbe, they share three grim characteristics: They're not native to U.S. ecosystems, people can spread them far and wide, and they can kill city trees.

Although invasive species like these can slip into the United States naturally, it's uncommon. Invasive pests and diseases are talented hitchhikers that can spread vast distances when people unknowingly move them. They hide in or on firewood and tree debris, plants and plant parts, fruits, vegetables, camping gear, outdoor furniture, and boots and clothing. People transport them across oceans, continents, and state lines.

Despite strict controls and national and state border inspections, invasive pests also can hitchhike in planes and on ships, and in the backs of our cars. Once they arrive, they feed on America's trees, crops, and other plants and can wreak havoc on the environment. A 2005 study calculated the annual cost of invasive species in all economic sectors to be close to \$120 billion.

There is good news, however: Although people are the biggest influence in spreading invasive pests, they are also an important part of the solution. The

number one action someone can take is to simply leave these hungry pests behind. The USDA's "Hungry Pests" campaign explains exactly how to do this, an effort that gives added protection to America's urban, suburban, and natural forests.

Hungry Pests is a multifaceted, multichannel, public outreach awareness initiative that offers a great deal to our nation's tree defenders. Its goals are to educate the general public about the threats of invasive species, increase awareness about safe and effective solutions to combat them, and encourage people to learn more at the website, [HungryPests.com](http://HungryPests.com).

The website has a wealth of materials that municipal arborists can download and use to raise public awareness about how to prevent the spread of invasive pests. Of the 15 pests targeted by Hungry Pests, four (the ones named above, in fact) attack forest trees. To assist our partners with invasive species outreach, the site has a PowerPoint presentation, public service announcement videos, flyers, bookmarks, posters, and informative pest cards on the 15 pests. To access these materials, visit the Hungry Pests Partner Tools page at [www.HungryPests.com/partner-tools](http://www.HungryPests.com/partner-tools).

The page has links to social media templates for Facebook posts, tweets, and blogs that can be



used by municipalities, environmental groups, companies, and associations that want to join the fight. Banner ads can be downloaded, added to municipal arborist sites, and linked to *HungryPests.com*. A sister site, *www.PlagasHambrientas.com*, has the same outreach materials in Spanish. Many items have been translated into Chinese and Vietnamese.

*HungryPests.com* offers specific actions the public can take to help—"Seven Ways to Leave Hungry Pests Behind"—as well as an online video to reinforce these messages. The site features state-specific federal quarantine information; detailed profiles and pictures of the 15 targeted pests; and a computer-generated creature, "Vin Vasive," made up entirely of invasive pests that fly and twitch as it moves and talks.

In addition, the initiative has a strong social media component. Its Facebook page has garnered more than 63,000 "likes." There are Hungry Pests tweets on the Twitter feed of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, which has more than 11,000 followers, and numerous posts to "USDA Blogs." Hungry Pests has conducted an active public communication effort with media tours and public service announcements on radio and TV in both English and Spanish. In addition, USDA continues working with its partners to encourage other groups fighting invasive pests to use Hungry Pests to get their message out.

USDA considers municipal arborists as major stakeholders on the frontline in the battle against invasive species. These pests threaten urban forests and the beauty of city landscapes. We hope you use the social media templates on the *HungryPests.com*'s Partner Tools page to help

**1**  **BUY LOCAL BURN LOCAL**  
Don't give hungry pests a free ride  
—buy firewood where you burn it.

**2**  **PLANT CARE FULLY**  
Buy your plants from a reputable source.

**3**  **DON'T BRING OR MAIL...**  
Fresh plants or produce into or out of your state unless cleared by inspectors.

**4**  **COOPERATE WITH QUARANTINES**  
Observe agricultural restrictions and work with authorities.

**5**  **KEEP IT CLEAN**  
Wash outdoor gear & vehicles between outdoor trips. Clean lawn furniture before moving.

**6**  **LEARN TO IDENTIFY**  
Report signs of invasive pests at [HungryPests.com](http://HungryPests.com)

**7**  **SPEAK UP**  
Declare all agricultural items during international travel.

**HUNGRY PESTS**

**USDA** United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

*HungryPests.com* offers specific actions the public can take to help prevent the spread of invasive organisms.

raise awareness and to take action. And be sure to check out the other materials mentioned, all created for government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and industry associations to preserve and protect America's agricultural and natural resources.

For its part, USDA will continue to fight invasive pests on three fronts: abroad, by assisting countries battling pests on their own soil so they don't get here; at the border, through stringent import regulations and expert pest identification at U.S. ports of entry; and across the country, by conducting pest and disease surveys with state and other partners. USDA continues to develop science-based standards for safe and predictable agricultural trade, such as requiring wood packaging material that could be carrying tree-killing beetles to be treated and marked with an official international stamp.

All of these efforts have one goal in mind: Leave Hungry Pests Behind. 🌿