

Cottonwood

(*Populus deltoides* – Plains Cottonwood; *Populus fremontii* – Fremont Cottonwood; *Populus angustifolia* – Narrowleaf Cottonwood)

Cottonwoods are some of the **fastest-growing, most drought-tolerant** shade trees in Colorado. They are extremely hardy but prone to **branch breakage, borers, cankers, leaf spots, and root-related issues** due to their aggressive root systems and sensitivity to soil compaction.



Seasonal Pest & Disease Calendar

Icons:  Spring |  Summer |  Fall |  Winter

Problem	Type	<u>Active Season</u>	Icons
Cottonwood borer	Insect/borer	Summer	
Poplar twig borer	Insect/borer	Spring–Summer	 

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Active Season</u>	<u>Icons</u>
Oystershell scale	Insect/scale	Spring crawlers; visible year-round	 
Aphids (several species)	Insect	Spring–Fall	  
Leaf spot / Marssonina	Fungus	Spring infection; symptoms Spring–Summer	 
Cytospora canker	Fungus	Spring–Fall	  
Slime flux / wetwood	Bacterial	Spring–Fall	  
Drought stress / root issues	Abiotic	Summer–Fall	 

Pest & Disease Guide (Homeowner-Friendly)

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Common Symptoms</u>	<u>Treatment & Management</u>
Cottonwood Borer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large round exit holes • Sawdust-like frass at trunk base • Branch or trunk weakness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep tree healthy—borers attack stressed trees • Remove severely infested branches • Professional preventive treatment in severe pressure areas
Poplar Twig Borer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dieback at branch tips • Small holes at twig bases • Sparse canopy over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prune out infested twigs • Encourage natural predators • Professional sprays if widespread

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Common Symptoms</u>	<u>Treatment & Management</u>
Oystershell Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard, shell-like scales on bark • Branch dieback in heavy infestations • Yellowing or thinning canopy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat crawler stage in late spring • Horticultural oil in late winter • Prune heavily infested branches
Aphids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sticky honeydew • Sooty mold • Leaf curling or distortion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hose-rinse foliage • Encourage beneficial insects • Systemic treatments if populations are heavy
Leaf Spot (Marssonina)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown to black leaf spots • Early leaf drop • More common in wet spring weather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually cosmetic • Rake and remove leaves • Improve airflow; avoid overhead irrigation
Cytospora Canker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunken, discolored bark patches • Resin oozing • Branch dieback from tips inward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prune out infected branches back to collar • Sanitize tools • Improve tree vigor—no chemical cure
Slime Flux / Wetwood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oozing liquid from trunk • Sour or alcoholic smell • Discolored streaks on bark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly cosmetic • Do NOT seal the wound • Reduce stress (water deeply, mulch, avoid injury)
Drought Stress / Root Decline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaf scorch • Early yellowing • Premature leaf drop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep water every 2–3 weeks in summer • Maintain mulch ring • Avoid soil compaction over root zone

When to Worry vs. When It's Cosmetic

● When to Worry (action recommended)

- Large structural limbs cracking or dropping
- Borer exit holes or piles of frass at base of tree

- Progressive dieback in upper canopy
- Heavy scale covering bark
- Cankers expanding or multiple branches dying back
- Significant wetwood/slime flux combined with canopy thinning

These issues require **professional arborist evaluation**, especially due to cottonwoods' massive size and potential hazard.

Mostly Cosmetic (monitor only)

- Minor leaf spotting in early summer
- Occasional honeydew from aphids
- Some tip dieback from poplar borers
- Light wetwood seepage
- Early fall color during hot, dry years

These issues typically resolve with **proper watering and seasonal recovery**.