

CONTROL WEBWORM & TENT CATERPILLAR

What are They?

Two species of tent caterpillars occur in Nebraska—the eastern tent caterpillar and the forest tent caterpillar. The eastern tent caterpillar is by far the more common of the two in Nebraska. This insect feeds on wild cherry, chokecherry, plum, apple, peach and occasionally other deciduous trees.

Damage They Cause

Trees damaged by tent caterpillars are sometimes completely stripped of leaves. Trees defoliated over several consecutive years may be severely weakened and can eventually die. When not feeding, the larvae seek shelter in “tents” one or more of which may be found on the branches of each damaged tree. These tents are made of silk produced by the larvae’s salivary glands. The tents continue to increase in size as larval development increases.

Tent Caterpillars

Tent caterpillars produce only one generation each year. They over-winter in the egg stage on the tree. Eggs are laid in June in a mass of foam encircling a small branch. Egg masses are about ¾" long and ½" in diameter. Hundreds of eggs will be found in each mass. In April and May of the following year, the eggs hatch and larvae congregate in the nearest twig crotch. They will build a small tent where they are protected from the elements and predators. They then move to the branch tips and feed on young leaves. As they travel, they lay down a silken line which serves as communication to the main nest. As the caterpillars grow and molt, they increase in size. The tent is enlarged and may reach nearly a foot in length and 6" in width. When mature, the caterpillars leave the tree, disperse, and spin yellowish silken cocoons on nearby objects. In these cocoons, they transfer to the pupa stage, and two weeks later, the adult moths



emerge, mate, and the females deposit eggs on the twigs for the next year’s generation.

Fall Webworms

The fall webworm also makes unsightly tents or webs on various fruit or shade trees. Their webs differ from tent caterpillars in that they usually enclose the ends of branches. Larvae are pale yellow, black-spotted and about 1 inch long when mature. The fall webworm is a mid-to-late season pest.

Products to Control Them

Both types of caterpillar and webworm are easily controlled. They are easily stripped by hand from small trees. It is wise to destroy them immediately. They otherwise may pupate, emerge as moths and re-infest the tree. It is not necessary to cut or remove the infested limbs. On fruit trees, a regular fruit tree spray schedule will prevent any problems. Thuricide, an organic control containing BT, Permethrin, Imidaclopid contact insecticides, or acephate systemic insecticide may be used. Do not use the systemic insecticide on red maple, red bud, flowering crabs, sugar maple, cottonwoods, or elms.