

WEBWORM & TENT CATERPILLAR

Damage They Cause

Trees damaged by tent caterpillars are sometimes completely stripped of leaves. Trees defoliated over several consecutive years may be weakened and younger, untreated trees 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. 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.



Organic Control

Once the webs have been formed, insecticides are not typically effective, as the webbing protects them. If the tree is short enough, strip the branches by hand. For taller trees, using a hose on high pressure stream setting to break apart the webbing. Many will fall out exposing themselves as a snack for birds. It is not necessary to cut or remove the infested limbs, as they should leaf out just fine the following season.

Products to Control Them

If you choose to spray chemicals, timing is tricky, but might still prevent severe outbreaks.

On fruit trees, a regular fruit tree spray schedule will prevent any problems.

On other trees, start with *Dormant Spray* in March, when temperatures are above 40 to smother the eggs. Branches must be coated thoroughly in order to be effective.

These products can be applied in April and May, while the eggs are hatching:

Caterpillar Killer, *Bonide Eight*, or *Bonide Systemic Insect Killer* may be used. Do not use the systemic insecticide on red maple, red bud, flowering crabs, sugar maple, cottonwoods, or elms.