

Fall Webworm

Hyphantria cunea (Drury); Family: Arctiidae

Table of Contents

- [Injury](#)
- [Description](#)
- [Life History](#)
- [Management](#)



Fall webworm larvae (caterpillars).
Photo from www.forestryimages.org
Lacy L. Hyche, Auburn University.



Webworm web on a pecan tree.
Photo from www.forestryimages.org
G. Keith Douce, University of Georgia.

Injury

The larvae of the fall webworm feed on more than 100 species of fruit, shade, and forest trees. They are especially noticeable during late summer and early fall. The larvae spin conspicuous webs enclosing entire branches or groups of branches. The webs are more numerous in open locations, such as along roadsides. Larvae feed inside the webs, stripping the leaves with just the mid-vein remaining.

Damage is usually not severe, as fall webworms are seldom numerous enough to cause total defoliation. When they are present in large numbers the damage is still not serious, because these insects are late season feeders and by the time the leaves are consumed the leaves have already performed most of their function to the plant. The webbing, which may persist after leaf drop, however, is unsightly.

Description

The larvae are quite hairy, and range in color from light buff green to near black. Both color forms may be present in a local area. The adults are one of our common tiger moths, white, sometimes with dark spots on the wings.

Life History

There may be two broods of the fall webworm each year in some areas of New York State. The first brood occurs in May but is small and often goes unnoticed. The main brood occurs during July and August, and is larger than the first.

Eggs are laid in hair-covered masses on the undersides of leaves from May to August. The eggs hatch and the tiny larvae start building a web, enclosing a few leaves. As they grow, they expand the web, covering more foliage and thus encompassing more food. The larvae leave the web in the last instar, crawl down the tree trunk or spin down, and pupate in a thin cocoon spun in the debris at or just below the soil surface.

Management

Occasionally, an outbreak occurs on ornamental shade trees where the webs detract greatly from aesthetic value of the tree. Fall webworms are usually held in check by several different predators and parasites. Natural controls are usually behind the main surge of an insect population, but they catch up quickly and keep the insects in check.

If spraying is necessary, insecticides registered for homeowner use in New York State in 2009 include spinosad, acephate, and carbaryl. Make sure the kind of tree to be used on, and this kind of insect, are listed on the label. One or two applications should control a population. The first application should be made in mid-July; and a second, seven days later.

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This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office. *READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.*