

Bagworms

Family: Psychidae

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Evergreen bagworm: typical overwintering bag.

From www.forestryimages.org Lacy L. Hyche, Auburn University

Injury

Bagworms attack many deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs. Young larvae feed first on the leaf surfaces and later they eat all but the larger veins. Trees may be almost completely defoliated due to the bagworms feeding. The preferred hosts include arborvitae, juniper, willow, maple, locust, sycamore and elm.

Description

The larvae or caterpillars construct a characteristic case or bag that they carry around with them, hence the name "bagworm." The size varies depending on the species. The larvae of the Evergreen Bagworm, *Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis*, which is a common species, are 3/4 to 1 inch long when full-grown and vary in color from black to beige. The cases or bags are composed of silk and portions of leaves and twigs from the plant on which they feed. The adult males are small moths with well-developed wings; the females are wingless, legless and worm-like.

Life History

Most bagworms overwinter in the egg stage in the bags of the female moth. In late May and June, the eggs hatch and the young larvae begin to construct their cases and carry them about as they feed. They feed through most of the summer. In August when the larvae are full-grown, they attach the case to a twig or side of a building or fence post, and pupate inside the case. In September and October the males emerge and fly about to locate a bag containing a female. Mating takes place without the female ever leaving the bag, and she then lays the eggs, which will overwinter.

Management

Handpick bags from the trees and destroy them. If bagworms are found on the siding of the house or building, a stiff wire brush is helpful in dislodging them, but do not use on aluminum or vinyl siding as it will scratch and possibly ruin siding.

Insecticidal sprays can be used to control the young larvae and are most effective when applied in June when the larvae are actively feeding. Products registered in New York State in 2009 include: *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), spinosad, carbaryl, cyfluthrin, and malathion. Be sure to follow label directions carefully when using any pesticide.

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