

# Fall Webworm making its annual appearance

UNIVERSITY PARK, Md. — Those silky colonies now appearing on the tips of tree branches around the state are created by the fall webworm, reports J. Lee Hellman, Extension insect specialist and associate professor of entomology at the University of Maryland.

Hellman says there is a general misconception that those silky

colonies are the work of the Eastern Tent Caterpillar, a pest which usually shows up in May and has a preference for wild cherry, crabapple and similar trees.

The Extension specialist explains, however, that the webworm feasts on the leaves of a wide variety of leaf-losing (deciduous) trees throughout the summer and that this is the pest that many

persons are now noticing.

In the Mid-Atlantic area, the webworm produces two or three generations per year. But it goes virtually unnoticed until August, when the largest brood usually appears.

The webworm is easier to control and is probably less damaging than its distant cousin, the tent caterpillar. It builds silky nests at

the ends of prominent branches and generally devours leaves only in sections of the tree close to its nest.

By contrast, tent caterpillars hide their nests in the forks of branches and range far from their home base, sometimes devouring all of the leaves on a tree.

Each nest of fall webworms contains 100 to 200 caterpillars, and you may find 10 or more nests per infested tree during peak outbreak years, Hellman commented. But one or two nests per infested tree is the usual number.

The main problem with webworms is that they can create unsightly conditions for homeowners, the Maryland entomologist noted. But there is mounting belief that this native crawler plays an increasingly important role in the expanding fight against the much more destructive gypsy moth, an imported pest that ravages woodlands in the Northeast.

Webworm pupae or larvae furnished good material on which native parasites that may attack

the gypsy moth can overwinter, Hellman points out.

If you insist on keeping your yard attractive, he suggests either mechanical or chemical control measures. Mechanical methods include the following:

— Prune infested branch tips and dispose of them in your garbage can; or

— Comb off webworm tents with your hands or a leaf rake. Crush the caterpillars, burn them, or dispose of them in your garbage can.

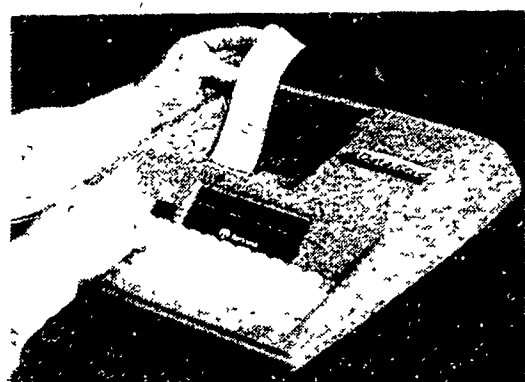
Chemical control measures should be reserved primarily for infestations of caterpillars that are difficult to reach. They involve using one of the following insecticides according to label instructions: — carbaryl (Sevin); — diazinon (including Spectracide insect sprays); — certain malathion formulations.


For immature caterpillars, you can use a bacterial agent such as BT (Dipel or Thuricide).

Additional information is available from your county office of the Cooperative Extension Service.



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