



BUG BIZ

Pest Management and Insect Identification Series



Forest Tent Caterpillar

The forest tent caterpillar, unlike its close relative, the eastern tent caterpillar, does not build or construct a nest in the fork or crotch of the trees infested. Instead, it constructs silk mats on the branches and main trunk when the older larvae are resting and not feeding.

Like the other tent caterpillars, forest tent caterpillars have voracious appetites and consume the foliage of several tree species, including hard maples, gums, oaks, birch, cherry, elm, aspen and willow. Red maple is never eaten. The deciduous hosts are seldom killed even by successive defoliation. Repeated defoliation, however, will kill branches or reduce woody growth.

The forest tent caterpillar overwinters in the egg stage. It hatches when new leaves start to break in the spring, about March 1. When first hatched, the larva is nearly uniform and black with conspicuous hairs. After successive molts, pale blue lines on a brownish body and a row of keyhole-shaped spots on a black back become more evident.

The larvae move in a mass about the trees and are usually observed in large masses on the trunks and larger branches. At maturity, five to six weeks after hatching, the larvae are 2 inches long and begin to spin cocoons of white- or cream-colored silk in rolled leaves or bark crevices. The moths emerge about 10 days later and are a light buff-brown and have stout bodies. The forewings have two darker oblique lines near the middle.

The adult life span is five days, during which time the egg masses are laid. Each egg mass may contain from 150-350 eggs. Like that of the eastern tent caterpillar, the egg cluster is a shiny brown mass encircling stems and branches up to ½ inch in diameter. The larvae develop inside these egg masses in about three weeks but remain in the eggs until the following spring.

Control

Early control is important to prevent tree damage. Effective insecticides for this and other tent caterpillar control may be found in the Insect Pest Management Guide, Recommendations for Ornamentals and Flowering Plants. This publication is available on our Web site: www.lsuagcenter.com.



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