



BUG BIZ

Pest Management and Insect Identification Series



Walnut Caterpillar

The adult walnut caterpillar is a stout-bodied moth with a wingspread of 1 ½ to 2 inches. The forewings are dull brown to chestnut in color and are crossed by dark, irregular lines. The hindwings are lighter without lines.

The fully grown larvae are black with grayish lines on the body and are covered by numerous long, gray hairs. The immature caterpillars are reddish-brown with narrow yellowish lines that extend the length of the body. From a distance they appear purple and frequently hold their bodies in a characteristic C-shape.

The walnut caterpillar appears throughout the eastern United States and is common in parts of Canada. It attacks a variety of deciduous trees, with a preference for walnut, pecan, butternut and hickory.

Adult walnut caterpillars are found all spring and summer. Females deposit eggs in masses on the undersides of leaves. After hatching, the larvae feed in colonies but do not construct tents or webs. As caterpillars grow, they molt or shed their skins several times. They are often found in masses on the trunks and larger limbs of trees where the caterpillars congregate to molt. Later, they return to the foliage to continue their feeding. Upon completion of

feeding, larvae crawl from the tree and pupate in the soil.

If environmental conditions are favorable, as many as three generations of walnut caterpillars may develop each year. After the final summer generation, the insect overwinters in the pupal stage while in the soil.

Defoliation, caused by the caterpillars feeding on the pecan leaves, can reduce the quality of the current season's nuts and, if defoliation is extensive, can reduce crop yields the following season. There have been reports of severe injury or even death to trees that suffered heavy defoliation two or more consecutive years; however, repeated outbreaks of the pest have been sporadic and relatively rare.

Control

In properly managed orchards, the walnut caterpillar is seldom a pest. Sprays that are routinely applied to control more threatening pecan insects also will control walnut caterpillars. In residential areas the walnut caterpillar can be a serious pest, because homeowners rarely have the type of spray equipment

required to cover large pecan trees adequately.

It is more economical to prune walnut caterpillars from the trees when only a few colonies of the pest are found and are on the lower canopy. Periodic inspection of the trees will allow for removal of the insects before they do extensive damage. Frequent observation also may permit destruction of the larvae as they cluster on the trunk and large limbs to molt.

If a homeowner chooses to spray, several insecticides are available and safe for use in residential areas that control the walnut caterpillar satisfactorily. Consult the Insect Pest Management Guide for the insecticide usage and proper rates to apply. This guide can be found on our Web site: www.lsuagcenter.com.



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