

## Eastern Tent Caterpillar

*Malacosoma americanum*

The eastern tent caterpillar is a pest native to the United States whose presence was first recorded in the mid-1600's. It is found in eastern and central United States and has been seen as far west as the Rocky Mountains. It appears in large numbers, generally every ten years. The tent caterpillar favors wild cherry, apple and crabapple. It also feeds on ash, birch, sweetgum, willow, maple, oak, poplar and various *Prunus* species. It is not considered a serious pest except when attacking black cherry. Wild cherry trees seem to withstand repeated infestations.

**SYMPTOMS:** The larvae (caterpillars) spin a silken webbing as they move. They radiate out from a branch fork creating the so-called tent. When populations are large, trees can become unsightly with webbing, and most of the foliage may be devoured by the caterpillars.

During winter, egg masses encircle smaller twigs of the host tree. The egg mass looks as if it has been varnished and can be up to 3/4" in length and contain 150 to 350 eggs.

**CAUSE:** The adult stage is a reddish brown moth that deposits its eggs in summer. When the eggs hatch the following spring, serious damage begins as the caterpillars' voracious feeding can defoliate the host tree.

The fully grown caterpillar is black with a white stripe down the back with several bright blue spots along each side.

**SOLUTION:** Damage on smaller trees can be reduced by removing the egg masses during winter. Remove larvae by clipping and destroying the tents when they are still small and inside the tent.

A commercially available bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.), can be used to control the larvae. Natural predators include various ground beetles and parasitic wasps. Chemical applications may also be used.



*Eastern tent caterpillar webs on host tree.*



*Eastern tent caterpillars spinning their webbing on host tree.*