

Fall Webworm

Hyphantria cunea

Despite the seasonal connotation of its name, fall webworm emerges from its wintering stage as a moth during late spring and summer, while the caterpillar's webbing is most noticeable as fall approaches.

This pest is generally noticed when its silken web nests envelop tree branches or even small trees. It is the unsightliness of these webs which draws attention to this pest.

Common throughout the United States and Canada, these caterpillars feed on over 100 species of forest, fruit and shade trees. Some of the favored hosts include wild cherry, pecan, black walnut, persimmon, mulberry and sweetgum.



Fall webworm webs

SYMPTOMS: Large masses of unsightly webbing on the ends of tree branches are the most noticeable indication of the presence of fall webworms.

Young caterpillars skeletonize the leaves. As they mature, they eat everything but the midrib and larger leaf veins, always feeding inside their web and expanding its size as more food is needed.

CAUSE: In the spring, white adult moths emerge and each female deposits 200-300 eggs on the underside of leaves. Hatching takes place in one to two weeks and the young caterpillars immediately start to build a web over the ends of the infested branches. After five to six weeks of feeding, the one-inch long larvae overwinter in the soil or leaf litter.

The larvae are pale yellow or greenish-yellow with either black or red heads and with two rows of black spots on their backs. Their bodies have scattered long hairs. There are from one to four generations per year depending upon the location, one occurring in the North and four in the South.

SOLUTION:

- 1) When practical, prune and destroy nests.
- 2) Help promote tree vitality by fertilizing, mulching and watering trees which were attacked.
- 3) While the larvae are small, treat with a *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.) formulation or other insecticides.