Extension Bulletin 0827

insect answers

FALL WEBWORM

The fall webworm, *Hyphantria cunea*, is a widespread pest of many types of shade and forest trees. Black walnut, willow, and cottonwood are the tree species most often seriously infested. Orchard tree species are also commonly attacked. At least 85 species of trees in this country are fed upon. The fall webworm does not feed on conifers.

Fall webworms spin webs frequently mistaken for those of tent caterpillars. However, appearance and habits of the two species are quite different. (See EB1106 for information on and description of tent caterpillars.)

Biology and Description

The adult fall webworm is a rather attractive moth. It is white and may have a few black, irregular markings on the wings. The rear portion (abdomen) is yellow or orange with black spots along the sides and top. The upper portions of the legs or femora are orange or bright red. Adult females lay round, yellow eggs in masses on the undersides of leaves during June or July. The eggs hatch in about one week. A fully developed fall webworm caterpillar is about 37–50 mm (1 1/2 inches) in length. Caterpillars are yellowish brown with black and orange bumps with long tufts of whitish hairs. The caterpillars (webworms) complete their development by fall. The webworm overwinters as a pupa in a dark brown cocoon in protected places, such as in bark crevices or on the ground in the litter and duff.

Damage

Fall webworm caterpillars are found in groups and feed together on the foliage of their host trees. They skeletonize and consume the leaves under the protection of a tentlike web which they enlarge from time to time as they develop and as more food is needed. Large portions of a tree may be covered by these webs.

Fall webworm larva. ***(Photo courtesy of Jay Brunner)***

Fall webworm adult. ***(Photo courtesy of Sharon Collman)***

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Fall webworm tent. ***(Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Beers)***

Control

The caterpillars feed entirely within the tent, which protects them from predators and parasites. However, it also helps mechanical control. When the "tented" branches are within reach, they can often simply be snipped off and destroyed. This is a helpful practice if the tents have not become too large and the tree's shape is not threatened by this method.

Chemical control should be used if the infestation is heavy or if tents are high in the trees and difficult to reach. Bacterial insecticides containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* are formulated specifically to kill feeding caterpillars without harming other insects. For information on other insecticides that will help you manage these pests, please check with your county extension agent, who has access to the latest product listings in the *PNW Insect Management Handbook*. Products are not listed here due to continuing changes in marketed pesticides.

Remarks

Apply pesticide as soon as webs appear. Repeat applications may be necessary.

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