

Fall Webworm: Identification and Control

Identification: There are two different types of fall webworm: black headed and red headed. The more commonly seen larvae in Wisconsin are the black headed (pictured to the right). The caterpillars are a creamy white to yellow, with two rows of black spots running along their back, and a black head. They will spend a majority of their life inside the web that encompasses the tree's foliage, which is unlike that of the tent caterpillar. They will only emerge when they reach maturity.



Life Cycle: The fall webworm's life cycle is somewhat different than the other caterpillars we are more familiar with, such as gypsy moth and tent caterpillar. The latter caterpillars emerge from egg masses in spring and immediately start defoliating trees. However, the fall webworm emerges as an adult in mid- to late June, lays eggs, and larvae hatch within 7 days. They form webs at the ends of branches (instead of in the crotches of trees like tent caterpillars do). These caterpillars are gregarious, meaning they live together in large numbers. You will often find hundreds of caterpillars inside the webs of your trees. They typically take about 6 weeks to mature, which is when they will go off on their own to feed independently.



Damage: The small larvae will first skeletonize a tree's foliage, meaning they will eat the tissue between the outside layers of the leaf. Once they reach a certain size and maturity, they will eat all the leaf tissue instead of skeletonizing it. Their web gets continuously larger as they defoliate the plant and incorporate new foliage into their feeding frenzy. As mentioned above, you will notice the webs on the outer branches instead of inside the tree or at the crotch. They will feed on over 100 species of deciduous trees and shrubs.

Control: You may want to cut the branches out of the tree and either soak them in buckets of soapy water or burn them. If you prefer to spray it, break open the webs first and use an insecticidal soap or *Bacillus thuringiensis* on the caterpillars themselves.

Created by: Jessica Wickland

Seasonal Horticulture
Outagamie County UW-Extension
3365 W. Brewster St.
Appleton WI 54914
Telephone: (920) 832-5119
Web Site: <http://outagamie.uwex.edu/>
Publications: <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/>