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FALL WEBWORM (*Hyphantria cunea*)

The Fall webworm is a species of tiger moth (Arctiinae) named for its social caterpillar stage. The caterpillars collaboratively spin messy, web-like silk tents over the ends of host tree branches. These webbed branches become completely stripped and defoliated by the feeding of these caterpillars. This behavior contrasts with that of tent caterpillars, whose tents are built at the intersection of host tree trunk and branches. These 'nests' are thick and triangular in shape. Fall webworms feed on a wide variety of deciduous trees. Common landscape plants include walnut, elm, apple, and maple.

Description and Life Cycle:

Fall webworm caterpillars have a greenish or yellowish body with a black or red head. They are sparsely covered with long white hairs. Mature caterpillars reach about 1 inch in length and will twitch in unison if disturbed. Adult fall webworm moths are



Mark Dreiling, Bugwood.org

Fig. 1: Fall webworm adult



Steven Katovich, Bugwood.org

Fig. 2: Fall webworm larvae and damage

distinctively marked white with black spots, with a 1-2-inch wingspan (Fig. 1).

Overwintering pupae spend the winter protected in leaf litter and adult moths emerge in early summer. Eggs are laid in masses on the underside of host tree leaves. Communal webs begin to be formed immediately after the caterpillars' hatch. These webs start small and are gradually enlarged to envelop fresh foliage as the caterpillars develop (Fig. 2). The caterpillars reach maturity in about six weeks.

There can be two generations of the moth a year, but the early generation defoliation can be masked by a second flush of foliage in early summer. Damage later in the summer season is what is mostly commonly seen.

Control:

In most cases damage to trees is not extensive and so substantial control is rarely required. Monitor landscape trees for early nests and either sweep them out using a broom where it is safe to reach or prune them out. A foliar application of Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) directly on the nest and adjacent leaves will control very young caterpillars. Insecticidal soap and Spinosad can also be used.