Plant Disease and Insect Advisory

Entomology and Plant Pathology
Oklahoma State University
127 Noble Research Center
Stillwater, OK 74078

Vol. 2, No. 18 Website: http://entoplp.okstate.edu/Pddl/advisory.htm July 8, 2003

Fall Webworms are Active

Tom A. Royer, Extension Entomologist

First generation fall webworms have become very noticeable in Oklahoma this year. This pest occurs every year, but heavy infestations occur irregularly. These insects have been hatching since early June, and will continue to visibly build their webs through mid-late July. In my opinion, we have the potential for a very heavy second generation infestation, based upon the abundance of this first generation.

Fall webworms overwinter as pupae and emerge as adult moths in late April through May. A female moth can lay up to 500 eggs which are deposited in masses on the underside of leaves. Larvae hatch in early June and immediately begin to form a silken tent, in which they feed for about 40 to 50 days. All larvae within a single web are from the same female. The larva can vary in color, but usually have two rows of black spots down their back and are sparsely covered with long white hairs. There are two races, a brown-headed, and black-headed race that occur. While there are two generations per year, it may appear that there are more generations because the brown-headed and black-headed race may occur in staggered times. Their preferred hosts in Oklahoma are pecan and persimmon, but the can feed on nearly 90 different species of trees, including sweetgum, various fruit trees, cottonwood, hickory, and black walnut.

Fall webworms don't really cause any long-term damage to their tree host, but they can temporarily ruin the aesthetic appearance of the tree. Fall webworms are sometimes a choice meal for social wasps like yellow jackets or paper wasps, as well as many birds, so often, control may not be required if nature is given time to work. In fact, a homeowner may be able to assist this natural

control by tearing open the silken bags, which allows fall webworm predators access to the caterpillars.

If control is needed, it can be achieved on small trees be simply removing the nest along with the caterpillars. They nests should be put into a trash bag and removed. A high-pressure water spray can also be used to remove the webs and knock the caterpillars down. These caterpillars are susceptible to the biological insecticides *Bacillus thuringiensis* which is commonly known as "Bt" (Javelin®, Batospeine®, Dipel®) or spinosad (Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray®) which are available at many garden centers. Best control with these products is achieved when applied to small larvae. They should be applied as a spot spray by spraying inside the web and spraying some of foliage that is nearby the tent. Other chemical products available for the homeowners include Bayer Advanced Garden Power Force® Multi-Insect Killer or Ortho Bug B Gon®, or BugStop® Multi-Purpose Insect Control. Any spray should be applied with sufficient volume to penetrate the webbing. There are other products that are registered for control of fall webworm, just check the label to make sure they have fall webworm on the label. For additional information, check out Page 376 of E-832, the Extension Agent's Handbook. Remember to always follow all label directions before making an insecticide application.

Dr. Richard Grantham
Director, Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Samuel E. Curl, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.