



Fall Webworm

Forest Health Fact Sheet

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Adult fall webworm laying eggs under leaf

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Fall webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*) is a common defoliator of hardwoods in Oregon. There is one generation of this insect a year and damage is typically reported during the summer months when large silk webs or tents are visible on the branches of host trees. Webworm outbreaks typically occur in cottonwood stands along the Columbia River and in madrone stands in southwestern Oregon. The appearance of webs and eaten leaves can be alarming and make trees unsightly. However, webworm infestations do not cause significant damage to trees. Webs containing caterpillars may be pruned and disposed of early on, to prevent more extensive defoliation.

Hosts

- Major: cottonwood, willow, alder, ash, chokeberry, maple, walnut, madrone, lilac, various fruit trees, etc.

Fall webworm is found throughout the United States. Webworm has two color morphs. In the north, pure white adults and caterpillars with black heads predominate and in the south, adults are spotted and caterpillars have reddish heads.

Biology

Adults appear in June/July and lay eggs at night on the underside of leaves. Larvae hatch a few weeks later and feed together inside silk covered tents located near branch tips. Larvae do not feed on leaf petioles or veins, which results in leaves having a “skeletonized” appearance. Mature larvae can grow to over an inch in length and have a yellowish hue. The most distinguishing characteristics of fall webworm larvae are the long whitish hairs on the sides of their bodies arising from red or black spots.



Early stage (top) and late stage (bottom) fall webworm caterpillars

Top: Milan Zubrik, For. Res. Inst., Bugwood.org; Bottom: Christine Buhl, ODF



Christine Buhl, ODF

Webworm caterpillar in tent

Damage

Fall webworm defoliation usually occurs on a few scattered trees and infestations do not spread. Caterpillar feeding takes place within webs so only branches with tents are stripped of leaves. Because webworm feeding occurs late in the season, branches are minimally affected by the defoliation and typically produce healthy new foliage the next year. Fall webworm infestations are only a cosmetic problem but considered unsightly because of the presence of tents containing cast larval skins, leaf fragments and frass.

Management

Natural

Fall webworm infestations are regulated by larval parasites and predators. These agents can dramatically reduce webworm populations when they increase. Normally, fall webworm outbreaks completely collapse in 1-2 years.

Silvicultural

Prune and destroy branches with tents containing caterpillars as soon as infestations occur. Be careful to not over prune, which can be more damaging than defoliation from the insect itself.

Insecticides

Spraying fall webworm infestations is rarely warranted.

If treatment is necessary, insecticides are most effective against young (small) larvae and should be applied as soon as the infestation is noticed. Biological insecticides

Management

- Prune and dispose of webs containing caterpillars (be careful not to over prune)
- Biological insecticides have shown efficacy with limited non-target impacts

such as *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (Btk) have shown to be effective.

Pesticides registered for use on fall webworm can be found in the [Pesticide Center Online \(PICOL\) database](#).

When using pesticides, always read and follow the label



Christine Buhl, ODF

Webs made by fall webworm in lilac

More information:

Oregon Dept. of Forestry, Forest Health
 2600 State St. Bldg. D, Salem, OR 97310
 503-945-7200
<http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/ForestBenefits/Pages/ForestHealth.aspx>

References & further reading:

U.S. Forest Service:
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r6/forest-grasslandhealth>
Oregon State University:
<http://extensionweb.forestry.oregonstate.edu/>