



Integrated Pest Management Program

Plant Science and Landscape Architecture Extension

Eastern Tent Caterpillar *Malacosoma americanum* Forest Tent Caterpillar *Malacosoma disstria*

Tent caterpillar is the common name for larval stages of moths that belong to the Lasiocampidae family. Two species of tent caterpillars (Eastern and Forest) are of particular concern in New England states due to the devastating defoliation caused by their feeding.

Identification and Host Preference

The Eastern Tent Caterpillar has a distinctive white stripe along the length of its back. At maturity, larvae are 1½" - 2" long. They feed on apple, crabapple and cherry trees and build distinctive webbed nests in forks of trees.

The Forest Tent Caterpillar has keyhole-like, or shoe print-shaped, whitish spots on each body segment, which run the entire length of the body. Larvae have a bluish appearance and are covered with fine white hairs. They feed on several different deciduous hosts including: Oak, Maple, Poplars, Birch, Ash, and Elm. This species does not make a noticeable web, they tend to climb higher and are more dispersed throughout the host tree.

Life Cycle

Tent caterpillars have one generation a year and overwinter as eggs. Females lay a batch of eggs around small branches. The egg masses for each species are very similar in appearance. Eggs hatch near the time of budbreak on the host plant. Young larvae damage the newly expanding foliage and continue to feed on the leaves as they develop. Nests are seen in late May.

Management

During the winter or prior to budbreak, host trees should be monitored and eggs pruned out and destroyed. In the spring, newly formed webs of Eastern Tent Caterpillars can be pruned out or physically removed by hand. Insecticidal soaps are effective on the younger caterpillars and should be applied only when they are out of the nest to achieve proper coverage. Many other chemical insecticides are also labeled for this pest (contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information).

References:

UMass Extension: Eastern Tent Caterpillar and Forest Tent Caterpillar Fact Sheets
<http://ag.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/eastern-tent-caterpillar>,
<http://ag.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/forest-tent-caterpillar>

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Forest Tent (left) and Eastern Tent (right)
photo credit; A. Chiriboga UConn Extension



Egg mass on branch
Photo credit: Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service



Eastern Tent caterpillars in tent
Photo credit: Robert L. Anderson, USDA Forest Service