



Forest Health Note

Fall Webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*)

Hosts:

Cottonwood, madrone, willow, alder, ash, chokeberry, maple, walnut, and various fruit trees.

Importance:

Fall webworm is one of the most common defoliators 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. Fall webworm outbreaks have occurred in cottonwood stands along the Columbia River and in madrone stands in southwest Oregon.

The defoliation can be alarming and make trees unsightly, but no significant damage results from these infestations (Figures 1 & 2).

“...larvae feed gregariously inside silk covered nests commonly located near branch tips.”

Look For:

August – September

Fall webworm larvae feed gregariously inside silk covered tents commonly located near branch tips. Larvae do not feed on leaf petioles or veins, which results in damaged leaves having a “skeletonized” appearance (Figure 3). Mature larvae can reach over an inch in length and their bodies have a yellowish-tan hue. The most distinguishing characteristic of fall webworm larvae are the long whitish hairs on the sides of the body arising from orange spots (Figure 3).



Figure 1: Fall webworm tents and branch defoliation in upper crown.

Impact of Fall Webworm Defoliation:

Fall webworm defoliation usually occurs on a few scattered trees and



Figure 2: Fall webworm tent and feeding on madrone leaves.

infestations do not spread. Larval feeding is concentrated in the vicinity of the webbing so only branches with tents are stripped of foliage. Since webworm feeding occurs late in the season, branches appear little affected by the defoliation and typically produce healthy new foliage the next year. The major impact of fall webworm infestations is aesthetic since the tents contain cast larval skins, leaf fragments, and frass which are considered unsightly.

Control:

Natural

Fall webworm infestations are regulated by larval parasites and predators, and



Figure 3: Fall webworm larvae feeding on walnut leaves.

these agents can dramatically reduce outbreak populations when they occur. Normally, fall webworm outbreaks completely collapse in one or two years.

Cultural

Prune off and destroy branches containing tents and caterpillars as soon as the infestation is apparent.

Insecticides

Spraying of fall webworm infestations is rarely warranted. Insecticides are most effective against small larvae and should be applied as soon as the infestation is

noticed. The following formulations are registered for fall webworm control on ornamental trees:

- *Bacillus thuringiensis*
- abamectin
- carbaryl tebufenozide

Remember, when using pesticides, always read and follow the label.

For further information about the Oregon Department of Forestry's Forest Health Program,

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