



FBMG Help Desk
Question of the Week

There are caterpillars everywhere, in a web, in my tree
what are they?

*Answer: Most likely you are seeing tent caterpillars,
or possibly fall webworms.*

Points to Consider

Foliage does Regrow

While the caterpillars can cause the tree to be unsightly for a short period of time permanent damage is rare and the tree usually recovers quickly by growing new leaves,



- The best defense is to make sure that your trees are healthy and that your landscape is a vibrant area attracting birds, lizards and beneficial insects.
- A strong stream of water from the hose sprayer does wonders to knock them to the ground.
- A broom or a long handled rake can break the nests open.
- Keep an eye out for eggs throughout the year and remove when you see them.
- By the time the tent/web is large enough for you to notice they are ready to move on and leave the tree in search of a protected place to spin their cocoons.

Tent caterpillars have one generation a year.

The adult moths live just a few days.

Growing from 1/4 inch to approximately 2 inches, the caterpillars molt / shed their skin multiple times which can result in them changing color as well.



- Caterpillars and new foliage of trees emerge in early spring. The caterpillars form tents /webs, usually in the sunlight where branches intersect. These tents will be expanded as the caterpillars grow, protecting them from the elements.
- They travel a distance from the tent /web and eat in groups, returning to the safety of the tent when finished.
- When fully developed, the caterpillars will leave the tent and the tree in search of a safe place to spin cocoons.
- Soon after emerging the female lays egg masses of 150-400 eggs on the branches of broad-leaved trees.
- The eggs are attached via, spumaline, a sticky substance which when dry will protect the eggs with a hard coating.



Fall Webworms are Multigenerational

They have four to five generations a year.

The first generation emerges in the spring and the final generation overwinters as pupae. They prefer broad-leaved trees and have been in over 300 types of trees.

- The female lays eggs, (which hatch in approximately 2 weeks), on the underside of leaves.*
- Upon hatching the larva begin to feed and spin a protective loose silk web, which will grow around them as they grow,*
- The caterpillars molt up to 9 times and change characteristics each time.*
- When they are fully developed, they leave the web and make their way to the ground where they spin a cocoon.*
- They grow from approximately 1/4" to 1 1/2" in their lifetime.*



Biological Control

Both Have Similar Natural Predators

Birds and Lizards

*both are very fond of tent
caterpillars and fall
webworms.*

*If the tent/web becomes
torn or open then they
have easier access to the
caterpillars.*



Beneficial Insects Also Help

**Parasitoid Wasps and Assassin Bugs
both do their part**

Mechanical Control

Natural To Do's are Similar for Both Tent Caterpillars and Fall Webworms.



Make sure to check the underside of leaves, branches and trees throughout the year for egg deposits and early signs of nests. The eggs can be removed by removing the leaves, pruning small branches and twigs or opening the egg case.

Watch for early signs of nests as the tents/ webs start small and grow as the caterpillars do. They can be torn open for predators to get into, pruned out and destroyed, or knocked down with a hard stream of water. If the nest is too high up a long handled broom or pole saw may work.



Sweep up and properly dispose of any caterpillars on the ground that have been killed.

It is always safest to stay off of ladders

Chemical Control

Points to consider before Spraying



The trees will generally recover.

Pesticides are poison.

Not just the bad bugs are killed.



- *By the time they are noticeable the caterpillars have usually completed their development,*
- *Treatment is more effective early in the life cycle.*
- *In many areas those who spray can be held liable for damage to neighbors plants, pets, and property from drift. Consider your neighbors.*



Always follow the directions on the label and dispose of empty containers properly.



***Do you have questions
about your home
landscape and plants?***

***Contact the Fort Bend
Master Gardener Help Desk***

***Email:
FortBendmg@ag.tamu.edu***

***Phone:
281-341-7068***

***The Help Desk is manned
Monday thru Friday,
9am-Noon***

***References:
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