

Bug Biz

Pest Management and Insect Identification Series



FALL WEBWORM

Description: The adult fall webworm is a medium-sized white moth with a stout body. The forewings are sometimes marked with brownish to black spots.

Two races of fall webworm are recognized in Louisiana. Larvae (caterpillars) of the orange race have orange heads and tubercles (small bumps on the body), and the black race has black heads and tubercles. The larvae are covered with long silky hairs that arise from the tubercles. Fully grown larvae are 1 to 1 1/4 inches long.

Distribution and Hosts: The fall webworm occurs throughout the United States and southern Canada. It attacks many deciduous hardwood trees and a few evergreen species. In the South, pecan, hickory, persimmon and sweetgum are the preferred hosts.



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Life Cycle: The orange race has three generations each year, the first generation beginning in late April and the larvae of the last pupating in late October. The black race, generally more prevalent in southern Louisiana, has four generations each year, the first beginning in late March and the larvae of the last pupating in early November.

The insect overwinters as a pupa in leaf litter and the surface layers of the soil. Moths are active during the summer and early fall. After mating, the females lay their eggs in masses on the underside of leaves. Larvae hatch in about a week and feed in groups. As they grow, they construct large, loose, irregular, silk webs, which cover leaves, twigs and small branches. As the larvae need food, the webs are enlarged to enclose more leaves. When ready to pupate, they leave the webs and find protected places such as bark crevices or, for the last generation of the year, the soil.

Type of Injury: The large, ugly webs of the fall webworm seriously detract from the beauty of shade trees. Defoliation caused by the larvae feeding on pecan leaves can reduce the quality of the current season's nuts, and, if defoliation is extensive, reduce crop yields the following

season. Fall webworms do not attack the nuts and will not kill a tree outright. Massive defoliation over several years, however, may weaken a tree and make it susceptible to injury by other insects and diseases.

Control: In properly managed commercial orchards, the fall webworm is seldom a pest. Sprays routinely applied to control more serious pecan insects also control webworms. In residential areas, it is one of the most important pecan pests because homeowners rarely have the type of spray equipment required to cover large pecan trees adequately and supply enough pressure to penetrate the webs.

When only a few webs are involved on small trees, it is more economical to prune them from the trees. Periodic inspection will allow removing the webs before they become large, numerous and unsightly.

If a homeowner chooses to spray, several insecticides safe for use in residential areas are available, and they give satisfactory control. For the insecticides to use and the proper rates to apply, consult the Louisiana Pecan Spray Schedule for Home Orchards. This guide can be obtained from your local Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service office.



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