

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ugly Web Nests!

Oh my goodness, the trees are being covered with ugly webbed nests! It's quite obvious that fall webworms are back. You can see their nests scattered here and there in the trees of residential landscapes and wooded areas. Fall webworms are particularly fond of pecan, persimmon, sweet gum, and black walnut.

A fall webworm nest begins as a cluster of eggs (200 – 300 eggs) deposited by a female webworm moth on the underside of a leaf on a suitable host tree. Upon hatching the new caterpillars begin feeding as a group, and as they feed they construct the webbed nest about themselves for protection from predators and unfavorable environmental conditions. The ugliness of the webbed nests (filled with caterpillars, caterpillar skins and fecal matter) and the loss of foliage is what tree owners find objectionable; some owners fear for the health of their trees.

Various attempts at controlling the leaf-munching caterpillars are sometimes employed by desperate tree owners. Some of these control methods, such as burning nests or cutting off large branches, are much more harmful to the trees than the hungry caterpillars. There's no need to be overly concerned because healthy trees are not seriously affected by webworm infestations. Even after complete defoliation, healthy trees are fully capable of producing a new set of leaves once the caterpillars have dispersed.

Controlling fall webworm infestations is not absolutely necessary unless there is a significant objection to their ugliness, or the trees are grown for nut production. Tree owners may consider insecticidal treatments; however, success with insecticides is dependent upon application and timing. A high-pressure sprayer is needed to reach the tops of trees with the spray, and for penetrating the webbed nests with the insecticide. Insecticide treatments are more effective when the caterpillars and their webbed nests are quite small.

A simple, inexpensive and non-insecticidal way to remove infestations from small trees is to tear open the webbed nests and disperse the worms. You can do this with a sturdy, light-weight pole. A nail inserted crosswise at the top end of the pole increases the efficiency of the operation. Thrust the end of the pole into the webbed nest and pull with a slight twisting motion to remove the nest. Be careful; never attempt to clear webbed nests near power lines!

Webworm infestations are cyclical; worse some years and non-existent in other years. Healthy trees quickly recover from heavy fall webworm infestations. Controlling webworms infestations in home landscapes with insecticidal spray is an option if the ugliness of the webbed nests is objectionable.

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