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Webworms

Many north Texas homeowners are noticing unsightly silken webs appearing on a variety of trees this fall. One of the most common foliage feeding caterpillars in north Texas is the fall webworm, *Hyphantria cunea*. Despite its name, the fall webworm is active throughout the warm season and will produce about three to four generations in Texas. The early appearance of fall webworm caterpillars in 2007 may indicate a banner year for this pest.

Fall webworm is a caterpillar, the immature stage of a non-descript white moth. The adult moths emerge from cocoons in early spring and lay their eggs on the undersides of leaves of preferred host plants. As soon as the young larvae hatch, they begin spinning a loose silk web that soon covers the tips of the branches on which they feed. Inside the webbing, dozens of hairy caterpillars will be found feeding on the leaves inside. Fall webworm caterpillars are variable in color but have a double row of black dots down their backs and grow to about one inch in length.

You may be able to prune or knock the infestation out of the tree. Place a garbage bag under the web and use a rake to pull off the webbing and knock down the caterpillars. If you cannot reach the web, or there are too many to remove by hand, insecticide sprays can eliminate the infestation. Low impact pesticides (see table 1) for tree-feeding caterpillars include insecticide soap, horticultural oil, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or spinosad insecticide sprays. Pyrethroid insecticides (see table 2) will also provide fast control of most caterpillars.

Unless infestations cover a tree, they are usually not that damaging to tree health. An otherwise healthy tree will withstand up to 40% defoliation during the summer months, and will often re-leaf after being stripped by caterpillars. So if you don't treat in time, don't worry. Chances are your tree will survive, although you may not be happy with its "webby" appearance.

Other common, summer-feeding tree caterpillars include the eastern tent caterpillar (makes webs in branch crotches and lives in the eastern half of Texas) and the genista caterpillar (commonly found on Texas mountain laurel). These caterpillars can be controlled in much the same way as the fall webworm.

Table 1. Classification of low impact insecticides, with examples.

Type	Common Name	Examples (Trade names)	Pests
Microbially-derived	<i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> , others	Dipel, Thuricide, Mosquito Dunks	caterpillars, mosquitoes

spinosad	Fertilome Bagworm and Tent Caterpillar spray, others	caterpillars, thrips, fire ants	
Contact insecticides (kill only when sprayed directly on the pest)	soap	Safer's Soap, others	small, soft-bodied pests (aphids, mites, caterpillars, mealybugs)
horticultural oil	GreenLight Dormant Oil, Sunspray, Neem oil, Rose Defense, others	small, soft-bodied pests (aphids, mites, caterpillars, mealybugs, scale insects)	

Table 2. Classification of conventional insecticides, with examples.

Systemics (water-soluble insecticides that can be taken up by plants)	acephate	Orthene, others	chewing and sucking insects, mites and lacebugs
imidacloprid	Bayer Advanced Garden products	sucking insects, beetle larvae, white grubs	
dinotefuran	Spectracide Systemic Tree and Shrub Insect Control + Fertilizer	sucking insects including armored scale, beetle larvae, some borers	
disyston	Bayer Advanced Garden Rose Insect Killer Granules	sucking and chewing insects (moderate-high toxicity)	
Pyrethroids	permethrin	Conquest, Spectracide,	sprays and granules for chewing and crawling insects, borers
esfenvalerate, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, tralomethrin, cypermethrin, others	Ortho Home Defense, Bayer Advanced Garden, Zep, others...	these newer pyrethroids generally provide longer residual and higher activity on chewing and crawling insects	

Other residual insecticides (leave a killing residue on surfaces)	carbaryl	Garden Tech Sevin, others	chewing and crawling insects, slugs, snails
malathion	Malathion, others	short-lived residual treatment for a variety of chewing, crawling insects, mosquitoes	
fipronil residual	Over N Out, MaxForce ant baits, others long-	granular product for fire ant control, termites, general treatment for crawling insects, especially ants	