



ENTFACT-401

CANKERWORMS

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Order: Lepidoptera

Family: Geometridae

***Paleacrita vernata* (Spring cankerworm)**

***Alsophila pometaria* (Fall cankerworm)**

Most caterpillars have five pairs of prolegs (fleshy abdominal legs) including the pair at the tail end. The spring cankerworm has two pairs of prolegs and the fall cankerworm has three. This reduced number of legs causes the caterpillars to crawl with a looping or inch-worm type movement. When pale stripes are distinguishable along the sides of the body, the spring cankerworm has one per side and the fall cankerworm has three. The color of both cankerworms is variable.

The eggs of both species hatch in early spring, about the time tree leaves are unfolding. Cankerworms feed for three to four weeks, then either crawl or drop to the ground on silken threads and pupate in the soil. Fall cankerworms emerge as adult moths in late fall. The wingless females crawl up tree trunks onto branches, are mated by winged males, and then lay single-layered masses of flower-pot shaped eggs on limbs and trunks. The eggs are the overwintering life stage. Spring cankerworms overwinter as pupae and emerge as moths beginning in February. The wingless females crawl up tree trunks, are mated, then lay oval-shaped eggs in masses under loose tree bark.

lm, apple, oak and many other fruit and shade trees are attacked by cankerworms. Entire leaves are eaten, leaving only the large veins. Generally most damage occurs about the time the leaves become fully developed. Trees may be completely stripped of foliage, some never having a chance to leaf out.

Cankerworm outbreaks sometimes occur two to three years in succession and then virtually disappear for a few years. If an outbreak can be anticipated, tanglefoot applied to tree trunks in a band two to four feet aboveground will prevent female moths from crawling up and laying eggs in the trees. This technique may be preferred to insecticide sprays especially when dealing with very large trees.

Usually it is simpler to use insecticides when defoliation first appears. Effective insecticides are Orthene, Imidan, Sevin and Bacillus thuringiensis (Dipel, SOK-Bt, Thuricide).

