



# EASTERN TENT CATERPILLAR

## PREVENTION & CONTROL

### MEET THE PEST

Eastern tent caterpillars feed on deciduous trees such as apple, birch, poplar, willow and wild cherry and often cause extensive defoliation. True to their name, these caterpillars construct silken "tents" on one or more of the branches of the tree where they are feeding. Tents are often located in forks or crotches of the branches. The tent provides protection from harsh weather conditions and predators. The caterpillars feed during the day, and at night, they return to the tent.

A fully grown Eastern tent caterpillar is approximately 2 ½ inches (6 1/4 cm) long, hairy and black, with a cream coloured stripe down its back. Blue spots and brown and yellow lines can also be seen along the sides of the caterpillar's body.

Healthy trees can generally tolerate occasional feeding by this insect. However, repeated infestation can weaken the tree and make it more susceptible to damage from other insects and diseases.

### LIFE CYCLE

The life cycle of the eastern tent caterpillar consists of egg, larva, pupa and adult stages. In June or July, the female adult, a reddish-brown moth, lays her eggs on a branch. The eggs are laid in masses of up to 300 eggs held together by a dark foam-like substance. The following spring when the leaves begin to unfold, the eggs hatch into the larval stage. It is the larval stage (caterpillar) of the life cycle which causes damage. The caterpillars feed for approximately five to seven weeks

until they reach maturity. In early July, the caterpillar spins a cocoon and pupates for two weeks. After emerging as adults, the moths mate and eggs are laid within a period of 24 hours. Only one generation of Eastern tent caterpillars is produced each year.

### MONITORING

You can monitor for the presence of Eastern tent caterpillar at different times of the year. Check for the egg masses in the fall and early spring. Look for small silky tents during the late spring. If either eggs or tents are present, the caterpillars can be controlled using one or more of the following methods.

### CONTROL

#### Physical Control

Control caterpillars at night when they are gathered together inside the tent. On small branches, prune out and destroy the tents. On larger branches or where pruning is impractical, cut the tent open and hand pick the caterpillars. The caterpillars can be placed in a bucket of soapy water or crushed. Prune out egg masses in the late fall or early spring to keep populations low. Eggs can also be removed by scraping the egg mass with a knife.



*Egg Mass  
on Branch*

### **Biological Control**

BTK (*Bacillus thuringiensis var. kurstaki*), a biological pesticide available from your garden centre, can be used to control eastern tent caterpillars. BTK must be ingested by the caterpillars to be effective. It is most effective in the early season when the caterpillars are young. Opening the tent prior to applying BTK will help ensure that the caterpillars are exposed to the spray.

Birds, rodents and beneficial garden insects such as ground beetles and predaceous wasps also help to keep caterpillar populations in check.

### **Chemical Control**

If physical and biological measures are not effective use a pesticide which will have a minimal impact on both you and the environment. A dormant oil, applied to the egg masses in the early spring can be used to kill the eggs before they hatch.

Dormant oils can be damaging to plants if not used correctly. Ensure label directions are followed closely. In general, dormant oils are applied in the spring when temperatures are above freezing but before tree buds are showing any green colour.

If the above measures are not effective, consult with an expert at a garden centre to learn what other pesticides are available.

**Always use a registered domestic class pest control product labelled for tent caterpillar control and carefully follow the label directions.**

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