



Eastern tent caterpillar

Malacosoma americanum

Order Lepidoptera, Family Lasiocampidae;

tent caterpillars and lappet moths

Native pest

Host plants: Apple, crabapple, pear, plum, and wild cherry are preferred, but a wide variety of other forest, fruit and shade trees are hosts.

Description: Adult moths are light brown, 25 mm long, with two diagonal white stripes across the forewings. Wingspan is 37–50 mm. Larvae can grow to 50 mm or more in length. They have black heads, a white stripe down the length of the back and yellow lateral stripes with blue spots.

Life history: Overwintered eggs hatch as host tree buds begin to unfold in the spring. Larvae are gregarious and construct a communal web or tent, which grows as they develop and from which they emerge to feed. There is one generation a year.

Overwintering: As eggs in masses that surround twigs.

Damage symptoms: Silken webs in tree forks may be unsightly. When infestations are sufficiently severe, trees can be completely defoliated.

Monitoring: Eggs hatch when red maple blooms in the first week of April (Herms). Look for larval silken tents on preferred hosts in early April. Also look on preferred hosts in the dormant season for approximately 18 mm long, black egg masses.

Physical control: In the dormant season, prune and destroy egg masses. Destroy webs and their contents as soon as they appear.

Chemical control: Use *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* when trees are flowering to protect pollinating bees. Spray foliage when tents first appear.

Biological control: A diverse assemblage of parasitoids and predators attack this highly conspicuous species. These include parasitic wasps *Hyposoter* spp. (Ichneumonidae) and *Bracon* spp. (Braconidae), tachinid flies, hornets, yellow jackets, ants, predatory stink bugs, and birds. Epizootics of an NPV virus decimate populations in peak years.

Plant mortality risk: Low

Biorational pesticides: *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*, diflubenzuron, insecticidal soap, pyrethrins, spinosad, tenbufenozide

Conventional pesticides: acephate, bifenthrin, carbaryl, chlorpyrifos (nursery only), cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, malathion, permethrin



Early season defoliation caused by Eastern tent caterpillar. (84)

Photo: Cliff Sadof



Defoliation damage caused by Eastern tent caterpillar; notice the webbing in tree forks. (84) Photo: unknown



Eastern tent caterpillar adult female. (85)

Photo: Ralph Adkins



Eastern tent caterpillar (continued)



Forest tent caterpillar larva (top) and Eastern tent caterpillar larva (bottom); note the keyhole shape on the forest tent caterpillar larva and the stripe on the Eastern tent caterpillar larva. (86)

Photo: David Laughlin



Eastern tent caterpillar egg mass laid around a shoot. (87)

Photo: John Davidson