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Fall Webworm

As I travelled south this last week, I noted a bunch of fall webworm feeding. Have you seen them as well?

Fall webworm feeds on almost all fruit, shade, and deciduous ornamental trees. This insect is present more often on trees located alone. The larvae begin by constructing small webs near branch ends with the size of the web increasing as the larvae's need for food increases.

Mature caterpillars are yellowish with black and brown markings, and have many tufts of long hair. As larvae mature, they crawl down the tree and spend the winter as pupa in the leaf litter under the tree.

High populations of fall webworm can completely defoliate host plants but do not kill them. On ornamental plants, control is optional.

Pruning and destroying the infested portions of branches is a good control option while webs are small. You can also use a stick or pole with a nail inserted crosswise to snag individual webs. Twisting the pole after insertion will cause the web to wrap around the pole where it can be removed and destroyed. A toilet brush might be a good option as well.

Insecticides can also be used for control but a commercial quality, high-pressure sprayer is needed to penetrate the webs. Numerous products can be used for control including spinosad (Conserve; Fertlome Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew), cyfluthrin (Tempo, Bayer Vegetable & Garden Insect Spray) and permethrin (numerous trade names). Fall webworm damage is typically purely aesthetic, and control is not needed to protect the health of the tree.