

Featured Pest:

Forest Tent Caterpillar (*Malacosoma disstria*)

Forest Tent Caterpillars (*Malacosoma disstria*) are a native pest to North America. They are commonly referred to as Tent worms or Prairie Tent worms. In Western Canada, frequent outbreaks commonly occur over a cycle of six to sixteen years. The preferred host is trembling aspen however, many deciduous trees and shrubs such as oak, ash, maple, birch, and many other deciduous trees and shrubs serve as food sources and suffer from damage.



Figure 1. Forest Tent Caterpillars feeding on deciduous tree

Biology: The adult moths are very mobile and can travel far on air currents. There is only one generation per year. The eggs are laid in late July or August and the first instars develop within the eggs and overwinter. The eggs hatch at the same time the trees are budding the following spring. Forest Tent Caterpillars have a total of five instars and the greatest damage is at the 5th instar when one larva can consume 7 leaves. They will also migrate in search of food at this stage. Forest Tent Caterpillars spin silken threads which are used to travel. They often form clusters at molting (Fig. 2). After 5 to 7 weeks, the larvae will spin a cocoon and remain in the pupal stage for ten days. Adults

will merge in mid to late July, mate and lay eggs on twigs or branches of trees and the cycle is repeated.

Symptoms: Depending on the population of the outbreak, damage can be partial to total defoliation of trees. New leaves will re-grow however defoliation in consecutive years can cause dieback and mortality of the trees especially when the trees are under a combination of stresses. Migration of the larva can also be a major irritation to home owners.



Figure 2. Cluster of larva gathered on one plant

Control: Widespread control in forested areas is not common because trees usually survive an outbreak. Recreational and residential areas may initiate control for aesthetics purposes. Often mass larva population is controlled by lack of food or late frosts. Insecticide control includes Matador, Silencer, Orthene, Dylox, Malathion, and carbaryl products. For best results, apply insecticides on 2nd or 3rd instar larva in late May to early June. The biological insecticide, *Bacillus thuringiensis* can also be used. While populations do cycle, virus and parasitic insects can reduce numbers however control will take longer to impact Forest Tent Caterpillar populations than a spray program.

