

Insects -Fall Cankerworm

The Fall Cankerworm has affected much of the centre of St. John's in recent years. The trees most affected are older maples, hardwood trees and dense undergrowth. It is a destructive pest which can cause defoliation leading to dieback, and even mortality in previously weakened trees. It often occurs along with the Elm Spanworm, Spring Cankerworm, and Linden Looper. They feed on a wide variety of trees including Maples, Ash, Elms, Oaks and others. The young larvae; caterpillars; chew irregular holes and finally entire leaves except for the major leaf veins. High populations can defoliate trees severely and cause the tree to expend much energy to re-produce the leaves. They drop from the tree to pupate, often on silk threads, landing on decks, cars, etc. and being a general nuisance. They move by arching their mid-body to pull the hind prolegs up to meet the anterior true legs in an "inchworm" fashion. They feed on the leaves from spring to mid-July and then pupate on the ground or on the understory. The adult females are wingless and emerge in late fall to crawl back up the tree to mate and lay eggs on the bark for next year. The spring cankerworm emerges in early spring to lay its eggs.

The eggs are barrel shaped and laid in clusters of about 50, often encircling small branches. The eggs overwinter on the tree and hatch in early spring, just as the leaves emerge. The young larvae rapidly feed on newly emerged leaves. Crowded larvae often hang from strands in the trees. By late June to late July, the larvae of both species have matured and they then descend to the ground on silk threads, burrow into the ground to a depth of 1-4", spin a silken cocoon and pupate. They remain there until emergence to mate and lay eggs for next year.

Control

- Adult trapping: Band the trunks of susceptible trees with sticky adhesives, to catch the females as they crawl back up the tree in late fall.
- Dormant oil sprays: Dormant oil can be used against the eggs in very early spring. Thoroughly wet the bark and branches to drip off.
- Spray with BT: BT, or *Bacillus thuringiensis*, is a biological control quite effective against the cankerworm and looper larvae. Spray thoroughly after the eggs have hatched but before the larvae are an inch long.
- Insecticide sprays: Most common insecticides are effective against the larvae. Best results are obtained from sprays when the larvae are small and beginning to feed. Follow all directions on the label and only use products on recommended plants. Damage can occur to plants and mammals if the instructions are not followed correctly.

