

Insects -Elm Spanworm



Elm Spanworm is a destructive pest which can cause defoliation leading to dieback, and even mortality in previously weakened trees. The trees most affected are older maples, hardwood trees, and dense undergrowth.

Identification

- Eggs are laid on the bark of the trees in late summer. The eggs are barrel-shaped, olive green and laid in arced masses on the bark. The eggs overwinter on the tree and the larva hatch in late May, around the time of bud break in the trees.
- The larva are “loopers” or “inch worms” and are small and light green when young. They turn dark brown to black and grow to 2 inches long.
- The larva feed on the leaves for 4 to 6 weeks in the spring, causing a shot hole appearance at low populations and a feathery appearance at high populations. The larva drop to the ground on strings and they pupate on the under-story or in the lower portion of the host tree as well as near the ground. They can be found in the lower canopy of under bushes and on fences, etc. at this time.
- After pupation, the adults are white moths which fly back up into the tree to lay their eggs in August. They are on the wing at night, often in large numbers, like snow.

Control

Chemical controls may be needed for high value trees.

The importance of maintaining your trees in a healthy state will ensure their survival through an attack. Also, good air circulation and light levels throughout the tree will reduce the survival rate of the larva.

- Ensure the tree is planted in the proper location.
- Ensure the tree is well cared for in watering during droughts and hot weather.
- Maintain a regular feeding schedule of mild fertilizer (6-12-12) once each spring.
- Prune out dead and diseased wood. Prune to maintain a canopy which allows air movement through and sunlight to penetrate.
- Insecticidal soap and dormant oil may be used to kill the larva just as they hatch in May (before the leaves are completely out). Insecticidal soap and dormant oil must be totally coated on the larva and remain for 24 hours to be effective.
- BT is also be effective against feeding larva in late May and early June. The BT must be applied once the larva hatch out and remain for two to three days to allow time for the larva to ingest the BT.
- Always follow all directions on the label correctly. Measure accurately as too much can be very harmful.
- It is difficult to apply liquids high into the tree. Use a hose and hose-end sprayer or jet stream sprayer. Do not let overspray drip on you or others. Oil may strain structures, etc. Where possible, spray downwards as well as upwards.