

# From The Bedford Extension Master Gardener HELP DESK

Editor: Linda E., Bedford Extension Master Gardener, Help Desk Coordinator  
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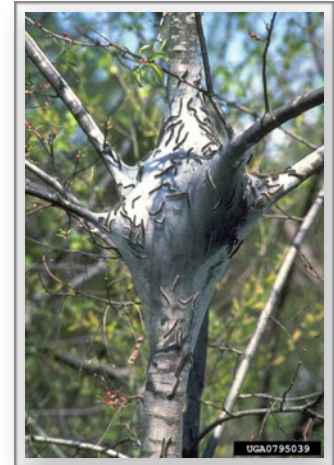
## THE TENT CATERPILLARS HAVE ARRIVED

### QUESTION

A few years ago the Help Desk received a few questions about tent caterpillars heavily damaging clients' trees, and especially a crabapple tree. Most callers wanted to know what they could do about these critters. This question is especially germane now as I drive around Bedford County and see **LOTS** of various sizes of tents of these caterpillars. I have battled these pests personally and this is an opportune time to refresh my/our memory.

### DIAGNOSIS / RECOMMENDATION

According to the 2016 *Home, Grounds, and Animals Pest Management Guide*, "...in the spring, scrape the tent off the tree in the early morning or late afternoon so that the caterpillars are in the tent and either crush or drop into soapy water to destroy the caterpillars. Prune lightly; too much does more damage than needed."



[www.sfrc.ufl.edu/extension/4h/](http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/extension/4h/)

Additional cultural control includes finding and removing egg masses in the fall after the leaves have fallen. Biological controls include encourage natural predators: birds, some beneficial wasps or tachinid flies. There are chemical controls that can be used very early in the spring if spraying for fruit trees. If doing so, use insecticides appropriate for the specific type of fruit, and read and follow all label instructions. [1]

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The favored food/trees of the Eastern Tent Caterpillar (Lepidoptera: Lasiocampidae, *Malacosoma americanum*) are black cherry, chokecherry, and apple. It also feeds on hawthorn, pear, plum, and flowering fruits.

The larval stage is brown and hairy, with a white stripe running down the back that is bordered by yellow brown. It also has a row of blue spots down each side. The young larvae hatch at or before bud growth in March or April, and gather in a fork of the limbs to spin their web nests. The larvae leave during the day to feed but return to the nest at night or during rainy weather. It is during this larval stage that the caterpillar does most of its damage by defoliating large sections of host trees.



[blog-yard-garden-news.extension.umn.edu](http://blog-yard-garden-news.extension.umn.edu)

The caterpillars are full grown (2 to 2 1/2 inches) in about 4 to 6 weeks. At that point they often crawl to nearby buildings or protected places to spin their 'dirty' white cocoon. Moths emerge in about 3 weeks and each female lays an egg collar (containing 150 to 350 eggs) around a twig.

The adult moth is dark tan in color with two pale stripes on each of the front wings.



[fcps.edu](http://fcps.edu)

The eggs over winter as one of many in a dark brown varnished collar or belt encircling the twigs. If

you can find these egg masses in the fall or winter, cut off and destroy all egg masses that are found on the twigs.

In the spring, if you are spraying, early control is important but difficult because larvae begin feeding on leaves unfolding from the bud before there is adequate leaf surface to be sprayed. "Insecticides with residual effectiveness are desirable. Most will kill larvae hit by the spray; however, larvae in webs are protected from sprays. Treat foliage and twigs during the day as the caterpillars hide in the webs at night. If treating fruit bearing trees, use an insecticide labeled for use on fruit trees." [2] For more information, go to websites listed in *Resources Links* below.

## RESOURCE LINKS

- [1] <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/Section04-Home-Ornamentals.pdf> (Table 4.5, page 4-44)
- [2] [https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/444/444-274/444-274\\_pdf.pdf](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/444/444-274/444-274_pdf.pdf)

*All resource links accessed April 19, 2016*

Answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions.

These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances.

For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

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### MASTER GARDENER HELP DESK

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / Email @ [BedfordMG@vt.edu](mailto:BedfordMG@vt.edu)

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