

Tent caterpillars tend to feed upon the buds and leaves of their hosts. They tend to defoliate trees early in the growing season so that trees often times are able to re-leaf and recover from the damage. In rare situations, a young tree is defoliated beyond repair, particularly if the tree has been stressed by other environmental conditions or if they are newly transplanted and do not yet have enough food reserves in their root system to keep the tree going during severe defoliation.

Controlling Tent Caterpillars

There are several predators and parasites which can attack the tent caterpillar. These can include certain wasps, flesh flies and birds. A more direct control method is the simple mechanical control option of removing the branch that has been tented by the caterpillar. This will remove the nest directly and therefore the protection for any stray caterpillars.

The other recommended and very effective option is spraying the tree with *Bacillus thuringensis* (Bt). Bt is a naturally occurring bacterium that will cause paralysis within the gut of immature insects in the moth and butterfly family. Because this is a very specific bacterium, it can be used safely around the house without any negative effects. Bt can be purchased at nurseries and hardware stores locally.

More information on this topic and other insect related areas may be obtained by contacting:

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Tent Caterpillars And Their Control



Tent Caterpillars Identification and Control

The tent caterpillar is widely distributed throughout the United States. There are several species of tent caterpillar. Several subspecies of these insects also exist across the country. The larvae of these insects can be very destructive to some fruit and shade trees as well as some bushes in our area.

The cycle of these insects is very similar. The tent caterpillars tend to overwinter as fully developed embryos in the egg stage. They hatch in the early spring at about the same time that the leaves and flowers on trees and bushes seem to emerge. The young larvae then emerge and begin to feed on the tender leaves. The larvae will then form a tent or pad of silken threads. This tent is used for resting, protection from bad weather and for protection from predators. When the larvae are in their early instars, they tend to feed in groups. As they mature to later instar stages, they feed alone at which time they tend to eat more leaf matter and cause more damage. After four to six weeks, they form a cocoon and enter the pupal stage. They will spend two to three weeks in the cocoon and emerge as adults where upon they will mate and lay eggs on live twigs and the process will begin again.

The Western Tent Caterpillar moth is brown with light buff-colored stripes and is the most likely insect to cause problems in our area. Other tent caterpillar moths include the Eastern Tent Caterpillar moth which is a red-brown moth with diagonal white stripes and the Forest Tent caterpillar moth which is a light buff-brown and chunky with two dark lines on the forewings.



**Male and female
Western Tent
Caterpillar Adults**

**Western Tent Caterpillars on
Chokecherry tree**



**Eastern Tent Caterpillars
on pad**



**Forest Tent Caterpillar on
Aspen Leaf**