

TREE DOCTOR TIPS

Cankerworms

DESCRIPTION:

Cankerworms are caterpillars of several North American moths that have wingless females. Cankerworms feed on the buds and leaves of trees in early spring and can be a major pest.

HOSTS:

Elm, oak & apple are favorites. However, wide varieties of tree species may be susceptible.

BIOLOGY AND SYMPTOMS:

There are two species of cankerworms that cause defoliation: spring and fall cankerworms. Wingless adult females deposit eggs on trunks or branches of host trees, one in the spring and one in the fall. For both species, larvae hatch in the spring at bud-break. They enter the buds to feed and first skeletonize the leaves as they expand. Then they continue to devour almost the entire leaf.

- 4-6 week feeding period
- Color varies: green to black; Length: up to 1 inch long
- Easily blown by wind from tree to tree

The chewing from the cankerworms causes skeletonized leaves, which lead to early defoliation. If several successive years of defoliation from cankerworms occurs there can be decline, sunscald, dieback, and secondary pathogens due to stress.

MANAGEMENT:

1. Treatment program using *Bacillus thuringiensis* formulations (biological control) or other pesticides. Continue until populations are appropriately reduced or gone.
2. Trunk banding to trap wingless females helps in reducing the overall population attacking the tree. This is most effective with a stand-alone tree that is not in contact with adjacent trees.



A



B

FIGURE A. BANDING FOR CANKERWORMS

FIGURE B. CANKERWORM DEFOLIATION

*The scientists at **The Davey Institute** laboratory and research facility support our arborists and technicians in diagnosing and prescribing based on the latest arboricultural science. For specific treatment and application details, your arborist may consult *The Davey Institute PHC Handbook*.*

