

infestation in our area I would like to share information regarding this pest in home pecan trees and commercial pecan orchards.

The walnut caterpillar feeds on a wide range of woody shrubs and deciduous trees in the walnut family (Juglandaceae). Its primary hosts include pecan, black walnut, English walnut, Japanese walnut, Persian walnut, butternut, and hickory. The walnut caterpillar, *Datana integerrima* (Grote and Robinson), is native to North America and ranges from the eastern United States to as far west as Minnesota, Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas.

Unlike early season caterpillars that feed on new growth, walnut caterpillar larvae prefer mature foliage. Consequently, infestations will not appear until late spring or after foliage has matured. Trees or branches that were defoliated will initiate new growth, which should not be damaged by the next generation. To help prevent significant defoliation, homeowners and commercial operators should know the following symptoms. Early detection is important so control measures can be applied before significant damage occurs.

Signs of activity:

- Localized areas of skeletonized leaves
- Colonies of reddish-brown larvae
- Foliage loss from larvae feeding
- Masses of cast skins on the tree trunk or main scaffold limbs
- Fecal material (frass) on sidewalks, driveways, equipment, and ground

During most years, natural predators and parasites keep walnut caterpillar populations in check. Several species of wasps and flies consume egg masses and larvae, and many other insects and spiders prey upon larvae. On small trees, homeowners can achieve some control by removing egg masses from leaves and larvae from the branches. For large trees or for large acreage, an insecticide application is the most practical way to prevent damage.

Insecticides that are recommended for homeowners will contain spinosad or *Bacillus thuringiensis* as their active ingredient. These insecticides are selective for caterpillars (Lepidoptera larvae) and very safe to humans. To increase the effectiveness of insecticides, apply them when the larvae are small and ensure that the spray covers the entire canopy. Broad-spectrum insecticides can be effective but carry some risk for the applicator and may cause secondary insect outbreaks. Insecticide labeling is subject to change, so always consult the label for target sites and pests, application rates, and safety precautions. The user is responsible for the effects on his or her plants, as well as problems caused by drift onto adjacent properties. The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service or this newspaper is implied. Have a great week. M.V.

October 3-7, 2016.