

Pest problems starting to show up

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Now that gardening season is finally in full swing, I am getting calls about problems that are showing up in the landscape.

One of the calls concerns sugar maple trees losing their leaves. This is likely due to an insect called the maple petiole borer, which does exactly as the name implies.

The adults of this sawfly lay their eggs in the petioles of the maple tree. The petiole is the part of the plant that attaches the leaf to the stem.

The eggs hatch into the larvae that then feed through the center of the petiole. This feeding causes the petiole to eventually break off and the leaves to drop.

This is not big deal for the tree as these insects feed only in the spring at this time. The larvae eventually drop to the soil and pupate in the ground for next year.

It is more of an aesthetic or messy problem for homeowners than anything else. The leaves tend to be scattered around like its fall.

Over the years I have noticed populations come and go. Sometimes it's a big problem and others it's not even noticeable. This is one of those pests that don't require intervention.

Another common pest we see this time of the year is the Eastern tent caterpillar. Their nests are becoming more noticeable in the Miami Valley area at this time.

This caterpillar hatches out in early April and begins to build a silk nest in the crotches of branches on trees.

They feed on plants in the rose family and prefer food in the genus Prunus. We typically find them on cherries, plums, crabapples, peaches and hawthorns.

Spray controls are not warranted because the silk nests are very protective. In addition, sprays sometimes kill the good guys as well.

I know that some have used a "torch" method. This is not recommended for many reasons but mainly because it can damage the tree!

These silk nests are a little bigger than softballs at this time and can easily be controlled by hand if you can reach them.

Grab the nests and either drop into a bucket of soapy water or smash the caterpillars. Your choice!

Left unchecked these caterpillars can defoliate a tree. However, they won't kill a tree. Populations tend to rise and fall through the years.

Gypsy moth caterpillars have also hatched and are actively feeding as well as a variety of other caterpillars.



Eastern Tent
Caterpillar nest
Photo by Joe Boggs



Maple petiole borer larvae
Photo by Joe Boggs