

Invaders of Our Oklahoma Hardwoods- Fall Webworm

So many of our Oklahoma trees are covered in large unsightly webs. From in the forests to the front yard. The webs are everywhere. Unfortunately, the wet spring we needed so badly made the perfect conditions for many more insects this year.

The most prolific sign of our wet spring is now the fall webworm. Beginning late summer they were barely noticeable, but now these caterpillar webs are colonizing on many trees. We are seeing them mostly on Pecan, Walnut, Elm, and Persimmon trees. Willow and fruit trees are also susceptible to the fall webworm.

- What is it? Fall webworms are the caterpillar form of a small white moth that many of us would have seen this summer. They fly around laying their eggs on the undersides of the leaves of many hardwood trees and a variety of shrubs. Upon hatching, the caterpillars then spin an unsightly web. Feeding on the leaves for about 6 weeks the webs can continue to spread reaching more than 3 feet across.
- What damage do they cause? Typically, these webworms look a lot worse than they are. While the webs are large and ugly the damage is largely aesthetic. Even if the insect defoliates a tree it is usually late enough in the season that the leaves would have been falling off soon. It takes consecutive years of defoliation to damage the trees.
- How do I manage it? Fall webworms are caterpillars and the recommended removal is by hand. Even if you cannot remove them by hand, damaging them with a stick or other handheld tool, or a high pressure water hose can open up the nests enough to allow natural predators such as wasps, and stink bugs and other caterpillar eaters to get rid of the pests. Use of chemical controls should only be used as a drastic intervention. In which case contact a pest control specialist. There are products available that kill only the caterpillar and not other beneficial insects.

So relax and take a deep breath of our wonderful Oklahoma Autumn air. We will still have plenty of gorgeous fall foliage to enjoy, and soon the fall rains will wash the remaining webs out of the trees.