



Cankerworms

INTRODUCTION

Cankerworm caterpillars are "inchworms" or loopers common on shade trees in late spring. Two species of cankerworms are landscape pests: Fall Cankerworm (*Alsophila pometaria*) is found in eastern North America as far west as Montana. Fall cankerworm caterpillars have three pairs of prolegs. The eggs are laid in late fall and winter. Spring Cankerworm (*Paleacrita vernata*) is found over most of North America. The caterpillars of this species have two pairs of prolegs. The eggs are laid in early spring.



Cankerworm larvae

Cankerworms feed on the leaves of many different hardwood trees, including **oaks, elms, apples, cherries, hickories, maples, ashes, beeches and lindens**. In addition, large caterpillars often spin down on silk threads from large trees and feed on dogwood flowers, rose buds and other landscape ornamentals.

DAMAGE AND LIFE CYCLE

Cankerworm defoliation increases tree stresses already present in residential areas, leading to borer damage, branch dieback and root decline. One year of cankerworm defoliation is not permanently damaging to healthy shade trees. However two or more years of defoliation will reduce growth, cause branch dieback, and lead to a general weakening of trees, allowing secondary insects and diseases to kill trees.

Cankerworms have only one generation each year. The eggs of both species hatch in early spring, about the time that saucer magnolia blossom and eastern redbud is beginning to bloom.

CONTROL: Regular landscape inspections should be implemented to monitor outbreaks. Cankerworm suppression can be achieved through the use of tree banding, natural, and synthetic insecticide treatments. A management program should aim to prevent two consecutive years of defoliation. Regular mulching and fertilization can help trees recover from cankerworm damage.