

FALL CANKERWORM—*Alsophila pometaria*; SPRING CANKERWORM—*Paleacrita vernata*

HOSTS: Boxelder (Manitoba maple), ash, oak, elm, linden, and apple

IDENTIFICATION, LIFE CYCLE, AND DAMAGE: Cankerworm caterpillars, also called inchworms or loopers, have 2 to 4 pairs of false legs, vary from green to reddish-brown to black, and have one or more white, pale green, or black stripes. Mature caterpillars are about 19 mm long. Female moths are about 12 mm long, wingless, and dark gray. Males are similar but have tan wings.

Fall cankerworm moths emerge, mate, and lay eggs on twigs during the fall and winter; spring cankerworm moths emerge, mate, and lay eggs in early spring (March in Nebraska). Egg hatch for both species coincides with the appearance of new leaves on their host. If the caterpillars hatch earlier, they eat the leaf buds before they unfold.

Larvae initially eat small holes in the leaves and later skeletonize them. Eventually, only the midribs of leaves remain. Cankerworm defoliation decreases tree vigor and is unsightly.

CONTROL: Spray leaves of infested trees with carbaryl, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.), acephate, or methoxychlor as soon as small holes or other damage to leaves appear and prior to complete defolia-

tion. Except for B.t., these insecticides also will kill beneficial insect parasites and predators that feed on cankerworm eggs and larvae. The number of eggs laid on trees can be reduced by banding trees with a sticky substance such as Tanglefoot[®] or Stickem Special[®], at a height of 1.5 m above the ground. The sticky band should be approximately 10 cm wide and can be applied either to the bark or to a strip of foam rubber wrapped around the bark. When the wingless females crawl up the trunk they become trapped and die. In Nebraska, trees should be banded in early September to control fall cankerworms and in March for spring cankerworms.



Spring cankerworm larvae and damage