

Pest Profile



Photo credit: [James B Hanson](#), USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org; [Mark Dreiling](#), Bugwood.org; [Steven Katovich](#), USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Common Name: Forest Tent Caterpillar

Scientific Name: *Malacosoma disstria*

Order and Family: Lepidoptera: Lasiocampidae

Size and Appearance:

	Length (mm)	Appearance
Egg	12mm (egg mass)	Eggs deposited around small twigs in dark brown shiny cylindrical masses with truncated ends.
Larva/Nymph	3mm - 50mm	Newly hatched larvae are black with conspicuous hairs. Successive molts show the development of longer hairs, electric blue lines along the sides of the body and yellow-white "keyhole" shaped spots along the back. Caterpillars construct lightly spun silken mats on which early instars congregate to rest during molting.
Adult		Stout bodied moth with buff colored to reddish brown wings, forewings are marked by two darkish oblique lines.
Pupa (if applicable)		White solitary cocoons of pale yellow silk hidden in folded leaves or other protected areas.

Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.): Chewing

Host plant/s: Broadleaved trees varying by region. Aspen and sugar maple (Northeast); oak (Appalachia, Central States, and Texas); water tupelo (Southern States); red alder and willow (Northwest). Fruit trees, ash, and poplar can be infested, as well as others.

Description of Damage (larvae and adults): Larvae are capable of defoliating large areas, with outbreaks approximately every ten years, typically lasting for three years. Light to moderate defoliation has minimal effect on tree health, but heavy defoliation can be fatal. Repeated defoliation may lead to dieback. New foliage emerging after defoliation is smaller, and defoliated trees have diminished food stores and wood production; maple sap flow and sugar content is decreased. Adults do not cause damage.

References:

Batzer H & Morris R [U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service]. (1978). *Forest insect & disease leaflet 9 [Tent caterpillar]*. Retrieved from: <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/fidls/ftc/tentcat.htm>

Cranshaw, W. (2004). *Garden insects of North America: The ultimate guide to backyard bugs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kraus N. (n.d.). *All you ever wanted to know about tent caterpillars and much more* [PDF document]. Retrieved from NYSDEC Division of Land and Forests Health & Protection: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/ftc02.pdf