

Weekly Column for Week of 5-10-10
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Eastern Tent Caterpillar: Threat or Nuisance?

As you waited to witness the beautiful blooms of your trees, perhaps you noticed thick webs that are usually formed in the crotches of branches. These webs are made by the Eastern Tent Caterpillar. You can identify it by its dark color and white stripe down its back. It can grow as long as 2 inches.

Eastern Tent Caterpillars hatch and search for v-shaped joints in branches to build their webs. The webbing serves as a barrier to protect the caterpillars from predators such as birds. The caterpillars stay inside the web during most of the day and become active at night to feed on leaves of the tree. When day breaks, they climb back into the security of their web.

If the web of the Eastern Tent Caterpillar can be reached, you can take the caterpillars and drop them into a bucket of soapy water. There are also some insecticides that control the Eastern Tent Caterpillar while preserving beneficial insects such as bees. Burning nests is dangerous and can cause damage to the tree itself, so it is not recommended as a control method.

Although the webbing in your tree may not be your ideal choice of decoration, the Eastern Tent Caterpillar rarely affects tree health. This makes it more of a nuisance than a threat. For more information about this caterpillar and its control, you can visit the web at <http://extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/HN-68.pdf>. You can also contact your Elkhart County Extension office for more information.

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