

NEWS RELEASE

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Leaf Feeding Caterpillars

Several caterpillars have been out feeding on our local plants. They have been found on vegetables as well as our ornamental plants. Caterpillars feeding on vegetables will reduce production and likely will need stopped. Feeding on ornamentals is less damaging but may warrant some reduction.

Numerous tobacco hornworms were feeding on my tomato plants. Missing leaves and their waste product were the first indicators. Looking closer, the tomato stem colored caterpillars are noticed. Hand removal is easy and immediate. Several insecticides that contain either Bt, spinosad or cyfluthrin or other insecticides may also be used to control most caterpillars.

My four year old Quaking Aspen has been a food source for the larvae of the Poplar Leafroller Moth. The larvae feed on the leaves of poplar, birch and willow. Leaves are tied together and eaten. My tree is now defoliated. Deciduous trees can send out new leaves. Recurring defoliation will sap out all of the energy from the tree.

Insects that protect themselves by rolling plant tissue over themselves make treatment more difficult. The first few leaves I saw, I tore open the leaves and removed the larvae. I apparently missed some.

If you notice leaves disappearing from walnut trees, it may be walnut caterpillars. Walnut caterpillars attack primarily black walnut, pecan, and several species of hickory trees, but may also attack birch, oak, willow, honey locust, and apple trees. Walnut caterpillars overwinter as pupae underground beneath host trees. In late spring, moths

emerge and deposit egg clusters on lower leaves. By the end of June, newly emerged and gregarious larvae skeletonize leaves. Larger hairy, brick-red larvae consume greater amounts of leaf tissue, and nearly matured gray larvae devour entire leaves, including petioles.

Catalpa sphinx has been found defoliating isolated Catalpa trees. The “catawba worms” are highly prized as fish bait. Established trees should be fine.

Monitor your plants. If you have a concern, give me a call.

You can find out more information on this and other horticulture topics by going to the Riley County, K-State Research and Extension website at www.riley.ksu.edu. Gregg may be contacted by calling 785-537-6350 or stopping by 110 Courthouse Plaza in Manhattan or e-mail: geyeston@ksu.edu