KNOWING IS ½ THE BATTLE:

The Cankerworm: Life Stages and Action Items

Late Fall/Early Winter

After the 1st series of cold nights, reaching at or below freezing, adult Fall cankerworms emerge from pupas in the ground. Females are wingless and climb up trees, and any other vertical object, searching for the highest point to mate and lay eggs. One female can lay up to 100 eggs.


Female Cankerworms

Action Item: Bands may be affixed to the trunks of trees in the Fall before adult emergence. These bands control cankerworm populations by capturing the wingless female moth during her ascent to the top of the tree.


Bug Barrier


Tangle Foot

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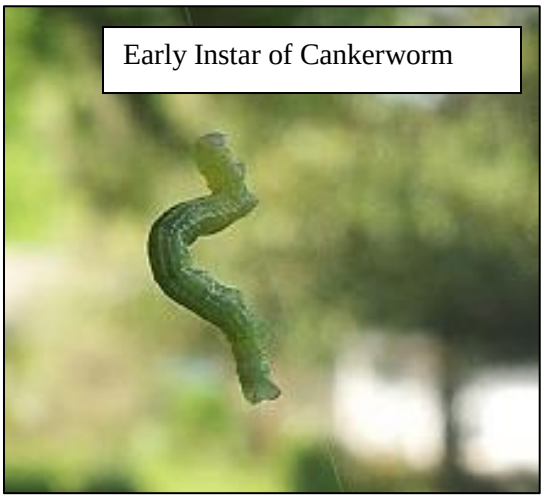
Early Spring

Just after full leaf expansion in early spring cankerworms emerge to feed on the lush new foliage. Cankerworms are not host specific when it comes to feeding, but in the Metro Charlotte Area they do the most damage to willow oaks, flowering dogwoods, and ornamental cherries. Cankerworms feed for 5 to 6 weeks.


Early Instar of Cankerworm

Severe cankerworm infestations can completely defoliate a tree. While one year of defoliation may not cause too much harm to tree health, consecutive years can become a serious stress for a tree. Every time a tree is defoliated energy reserves must be used to create more leaves. If these reserves are tapped year after year the tree may be more susceptible to attacks by detrimental insects and disease.

Action Item: If bands were not applied to the trees or cankerworms have parachuted in from unbanned neighboring trees, foliar applied products may be used to control the larva. There are a variety of products that may be sprayed from organic *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a naturally occurring bacteria that affects insects in the order lepidoptora, to naturally derived synthetic insecticides that are more stable, but still have little impact on beneficial insects.

Spring through Fall

After the cankerworms have completed their consumption of leaves they lower themselves to the ground, where they burrow into the soil and pupate. They live as pupa until late Fall/early Winter, and the lifecycle repeats itself.

Action Item: If your trees were defoliated, then the best thing to do is make them as healthy as possible. While trees produce energy in the leaves through photosynthesis, they get most of their nutrients from the soil they are rooted in. It is not uncommon for our urban/suburban soils to be lacking in some nutrients essential for plant health. Taking soil samples for analysis can help pin point what is lacking in the soil, and what fertilizer blend is most suited to your site.

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