

Browntail Moth Fact Sheet

Problems, Precautions, Prevention



Protect Yourself

The infestation of browntail moth continues throughout parts of Maine. Fortunately, in the past few years, Falmouth has seen a reduction in nests and levels of infestation. A spray program along public roadways in 2020 seemed to curtail the infestation even further. However, browntail moth has not been fully eradicated in Falmouth. If you have infested trees on your property, the following tips can help you mitigate the impact of browntail moth in your daily life. It's best to treat trees before leaves have filled in, generally by the end of May or the first week in June. Consult an arborist to assess conditions on your property.

Problems

1 The tiny (0.15 mm) poisonous hairs on the browntail caterpillar can cause skin rashes and make breathing difficult. Symptoms can last several weeks. **There is NO antidote.**

These microscopic hairs break off the caterpillars and become air born, landing everywhere—on trees, lawns, picnic tables, decks, and gardens. The hairs remain toxic for up to 3 years.

2 The caterpillars feed on the leaves of many hardwoods including, oak, apple, crabapple, cherry, hawthorn, shadbush, serviceberry, and rugosa rose. This can lead to reduced growth, branch dieback, and even mortality of trees and shrubs.

Browntail Moth

Only seen in July and August. Both sexes of the browntail moth have snow white wings and a tuft of dark brown hair on the tip of the abdomen.



Browntail Caterpillar

Caterpillars are about 1.5 inches long and are brown with a broken white stripe on each side and two red spots on the hind end.



Learn about Precaution & Prevention on the back!



Falmouth Conservation Commission

Sources: Maine Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry

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Precautions

- Avoid places heavily infested by caterpillars
- Take a cool shower and change clothes after activity that might involve contact with hairs
- Dry laundry inside during June and July
- In heavily infested areas, wear respirator, goggles, and coveralls (tightly sealed at neck, wrist, and ankles) when:
 - ⇒ Mowing
 - ⇒ Raking
 - ⇒ Weed-whacking
 - ⇒ Performing any activities that stir up browntail caterpillar hairs
- Perform the above tasks on damp days or wet down material with a hose to minimize contact
- Consult a physician if you develop a severe reaction

Prevention

Non-chemical

- Clip overwintering webs and destroy by soaking in soapy water or burning
- Clip webs in the winter and very early spring: October to mid-April
- If caterpillars are on structures hose down with water and vacuum up with a HEPA filter vacuum

Identify Winter Webs

Colonies of browntail caterpillars winter in webs on trees or shrubs. Spun in the fall, these webs contain 25 to 400 caterpillars. Look for:

- 2-5 inch long webs
- White silk tightly woven around a leaf or leaves of trees and shrubs listed above (most often on red oak or apple trees)
- String of white silk tying leaf petiole to twig
- Small brown hairy caterpillars inside dense silk web

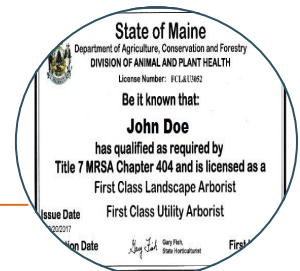


Chemical

- Look for a licensed arborist/pesticide professional
- If using pesticide on your own property:
 - ⇒ Ensure the intended site is listed on product label
 - ⇒ Always FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS
 - ⇒ Choose a product that lists browntail moth on the label

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Note: Pesticide use within 250' of marine waters is restricted.



For more information on browntail moth in Falmouth, visit:
www.falmouthme.org/home/pages/browntail-moth-0