SP152

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA IFAS Extension

Caterpillars of Ornamental Plants Sheet 1[1]

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Azalea caterpillar, *Datana major* (Plate 1). This caterpillar defoliates azaleas. Young larvae skeletonize the leaves, and the larger ones eat the entire leaf. The 2"-long mature larva can be recognized by the red head, the red last segment, and the broken yellow (occasionally white) lengthwise stripes. When it is disturbed, the caterpillar raises its front and rear ends into the air.

Plate 1 .

Bagworm, *Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis* (Plate 2). These are general feeders that spin sacks or bags of small pieces of twigs and leaf material (usually cedar). These sacks are 1/4" to 1-1/2" in length and usually are found on foliage. The bag is carried by the insect wherever it goes. The larva protrudes the front end of its body from the bag when feeding or moving.

Plate 2 .

Eastern tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma americanum* (Plate 3). Larvae are covered with long, soft, light-brown hairs. There is a white stripe bordered with reddish brown down the back; along each side is a row of oval blue spots and brown-and-yellow lines. The caterpillars become fully grown - about 2" long - in four to six weeks. Each spins a white cocoon, usually on the tree trunk, pupates and emerges as a light-reddish-brown moth. There is only one generation each year, with about nine months spent in the egg stage.

Plate 3 .

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Eastern tent caterpillar web (Plate 4). These caterpillars build large, thick webs in the forks and crotches of many kinds of trees, especially cherry. Larvae frequently infest and defoliate unsprayed oak, plum and poplar. These caterpillars do not feed within their webs, but congregate there during the night and in rainy weather.

Plate 4 .

Fall webworm, *Hyphantria cunea* (Plate 5). The pale-yellow black-spotted, hairy caterpillars hatch from eggs deposited on leaves by the satiny-white moths. The 1"-long caterpillars feed on leaf surfaces for four to six weeks, then spin cocoons in which they pass the winter. These cocoons are found under trash on the ground or sometimes under bark.

Plate 5 .

Fall webworm web (Plate 6). The larvae construct loosely woven webs that enclose the foliage at the ends of branches. Several branches are sometimes covered by a single three- to four-foot-long web. Webs contain many caterpillars.

Plate 6 .

Oleander caterpillar, *Syntomeida epilais* (Plate 7). It feeds only on oleander, a plant poisonous to most animals. At maturity, the orange-red caterpillar with black tufts of hair is 2" long. There are three generations a year. Overlapping generations may occur when the larvae and the adult moths, which are purplish-black with white dots on the wings, can be observed together.

Plate 7 .

Cabbage palm caterpillar, *Litoprosopus futilis* (Plate 8). These larvae are associated with the flower stalks of cabbage palm. The larvae may so damage the flower that the honey crop is reduced. Mature larvae are purplish-brown with numerous black spots from which the hairs emerge. They migrate from the plant to pupate and may enter houses, cutting through fiberglass screens. Inside the house, they may chew up fabric in draperies, upholstery and carpeting to use to form their cocoons. Development is synchronized with the flowering period of the palm.

Plate 8 .

Palm leafskeletonizer, *Homaledra sabalella* (Plate 9). The palm leafskeletonizer is detected by tiny brown fecal pellets incorporated in a silk web on the palm fronds. These pellets look like fine sawdust and are found on the underside of leaves or where they have been woven together. Removing the web reveals creamy-white caterpillars up to 5/8" long with eight faint reddish-brown lengthwise stripes. The caterpillars feed on the surface only. They feed only on palms. The tiny moths have a 5/8" wingspan and are inconspicuous.

Plate 9 .

Tussock moth, *Orgyia leucostigma* (Plate 10). The caterpillars hatch in late spring and feed on shade trees. They have stiff tufts of long black hairs, one on each side of the red head and the third tuft extending beyond the end; tufts of short white erect hairs on the back; and two red spots on the back toward the hind end. The fully grown 1-1/2" caterpillars spin their

cocoons on the trunk and branches or on a nearby object. Adult moths emerge about two weeks later.

Plate 10 .

A second generation of caterpillars feeds during late August and early September. Moths emerge in September and October. Flightless females deposit overwintering eggs on the cocoons, which usually are attached to the wall of a house. The tussock moth may produce a third generation.