

Do I have Bagworms or Fall Webworms? By Marty Morgan, Ag Agent

I have received numerous calls the last week or so of folks wanting to know how to control webworms(or is it bagworms?). Well, what is the difference, and how do we control them? First let's talk about bagworms. The small, silk weaving that resembles a Christmas tree ornament on your favorite tree or shrub is not decoration. These bags protect the pest in different stages. Bagworms' most easily identifiable feature is the tough, portable, silken case they build to live in. The silken texture of the bag is hidden and strengthened by layers of leaves, twigs and bark fragments arranged in a crosswise or shingle fashion. Newly hatched bagworm caterpillars are about 1/25th of an inch long. As the larvae hatch, they spin single threads of silk and attach to adjacent limbs or plants, where they begin building their silk bags. As the caterpillars grow, the bags become more elongated. At maturity, caterpillars may be 3/4 to 1 inch long; the bags hanging from plants are 1-3/4 to 2 inches and more than 1/2 inch wide.

Now let's talk about fall webworms. The fall webworm's name is somewhat misleading because the caterpillars and adult moths can be found in the spring as well. Fall webworms are known for their large webs on terminal foliage. Heavy infestations are rarely fatal, but if they occur over several years they can make trees more susceptible to drought, disease, or other insect pests. The fall webworm's plant preference varies according to region but seems like here in north TX they are not very picky. We tend to worry more about them when they are on our favorite trees in our yards, and especially when they attack our pecans and fruit trees. Depending on the weather we can have as many as two to three generations here in north TX and they usually start appearing in June or July on average.

How to tell the difference between the two! It's really not hard at all since bagworms make silk cases that are covered in foliage and other plant material making them look a little like homemade pinecones hanging from the branches. On the other hand fall webworms look just like it sounds, a web, wrapped around some part of the tree. They can be small or large but you can see through the webs and see the leaves and what's inside including the webworm. There really is no mistaking the two once you know difference. A lot of folks call webworms bag worms but the two are distinctly different.

Ok so how do we manage or control these two pests? The best way to deal with bagworms is to simply clip or pick them off the tree limbs and drop them in a bucket of soapy water. If handpicking isn't practical or safe, use insecticide spray. Apply insecticide soon after bagworm eggs have hatched or while the larvae are small and feeding. Determine the right time for treatment by collecting bags in late winter and keeping them in a container out of sunlight. Once the caterpillars hatch from the bags in the container apply insecticide to plants. If you choose to use chemical controls, applications of insecticide should be applied before early July in order to be effective. As for fall webworms one can physically remove the webs, caterpillars, or egg masses. You can knock larvae out of low-hanging webs with a broom. You can also prune webs from lower branches, or pull them down with a rake. If webs are too many or too high to deal with individually, you can use insecticides to prevent damage. Natural Insecticides containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* Bt) or spinosad are effective and will not harm beneficial insects. Malathion, Carbaryl(Seven) and pyrethroid insecticides (such as permethrin, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin) are highly effective against both. Hose-end or commercial high-pressure sprayers are best for reaching upper parts of trees. Webworm larvae stay inside their web so insecticide sprays must penetrate the web to be most effective. For best control, apply insecticides when webs and caterpillars are small. And remember read and follow the Label Directions on any insecticides you use. Good Luck!