

Newsarticle
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Caterpillars

While I was resting over the Labor Day weekend, others were not, including the caterpillars eating my cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts.

The rainy spring and summer have produced a bounty crop of caterpillars. Those eating my vegetables were the imported cabbageworm and the diamondback moth caterpillar. My first line of defense was rubbing the leaves and smashing as many as possible. The caterpillars were almost microscopic. Nature never cedes to amaze me at how something so small can do so much damage. I will also use sprays to keep the caterpillars in control, especially since the plants are so small.

Other caterpillars that can be seen now include tent caterpillars that usually eat the leaves off a couple limbs then disappear. Pecan, sourwood and persimmon trees are their usual targets. Treatment is difficult and not necessary. This year entire trees have been defoliated and full of webs but thankfully this should not hurt the trees.

Bagworms are also prevalent and can kill some evergreen trees like Leyland cypress and arborvitae. Bagworms are finished feeding and therefore insecticidal sprays are not an effective treatment. Hand picking bags off (eye-roll, yes this may seem impossible but if you consider each bag has hundreds of eggs merely picking off as many bags as possible will quickly reduce the numbers of next years population.) a small tree is the only option. Next year, spray them at the end of May or beginning of June.

Other caterpillars out now include oak caterpillars and azalea caterpillars. These caterpillars typically stay on the host plant and will not feed on other ornamentals.

Armyworms eat almost everything (check lawns frequently). The key to limiting their damage is spotting them early.

Small caterpillars can be killed with a product containing Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) or spinosad. These products are really safe. However, they don't work very well on full-grown caterpillars. Contact insecticides like Sevin or Orthene will kill adult caterpillars.

For more info about caterpillars, visit <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/shrubs/note07/note07.html>
Also be on the look out for stinging caterpillars. http://ipm.ncsu.edu/AG369/notes/stinging_caterpillars.html

For more information on caterpillars or their control contact the Wilson Extension Master Gardeners, Monday, Wednesday or Friday from 1-3 PM at 252-237-0113 or email anytime at wilsonemgv@hotmail.com.