

Oak Leaf Rollers - They're Back!
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With the onset of spring, small caterpillars known as oak leaf rollers are out and feeding. Hundreds of them may descend from the tops of trees dandling on thin silk strands, and when people walk under these trees, the caterpillars can be very annoying. Outbreaks have occurred in the Hill Country of Central Texas in the past and localized populations are present this year.

Though these worms are not harmful to people, their repeated outbreaks can be harmful to trees. During an outbreak year, the caterpillars can defoliate an entire tree. While a single defoliation rarely kills a tree, growing a new flush of leaves uses up the tree's reserve food supply and this can weaken the tree. More importantly, weakened trees are more susceptible to insects, diseases and environmental stresses. By keeping trees healthy, the susceptibility to these stresses can be reduced.

The larval stage of the oak leaf roller is a green caterpillar with a black head. These insects will feed on leaves through late April and then enter a pupal stage. In May, the pupa develops into a small moth which mates and lays eggs on twigs of oak, hackberry, pecan and walnut. The eggs hatch the following spring and the cycle repeats. In addition to oak leaf rollers, cankerworms (inchworms), forest tent caterpillars and other species are present in many areas this time of year but are rarely a serious threat to tree health.

Control of oak leaf roller is not usually necessary as several species of wasps and birds feed on these caterpillars, keeping their numbers in check. Chemical treatments are available but are only recommended for use on severely affected trees or in orchards. Application of a balanced fertilizer for trees that have been repeatedly defoliated two or more years is generally the best treatment.

For more information, pictures and treatment options, click on the Texas AgriLife Extension link:

<http://entowww.tamu.edu/extension/publications/E206.pdf>.

Or contact Jim Houser, Texas Forest Service Oak Wilt Technical Coordinator: 512-339-4589.