

Insect answers



**SILVER-SPOTTED
TIGER MOTH**

The silver-spotted tiger moth, *Halisidota argentata*, or silver-spotted halisidota, as it is sometimes called, is an occasional pest of ornamental conifers. Its main host is Douglas-fir, but it will sometimes feed on spruce, pine, and other conifers. This insect is often confused with tent caterpillars because both make tents; however, they do not feed on the same kinds of trees.

Description and Life History

The silver-spotted tiger moth has four stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. The adult is a large moth with a wingspread of about 2 inches. The forewings are reddish brown with many silvery spots. The hindwings are white to tan.

The larva or caterpillar is the damaging stage.

Mature caterpillars are about 1 1/2 inches in length and covered with a combination of dense black, reddish brown, and yellowish hairs. It is said that these hairs are poisonous and upon contact may cause rash, itching, or a burning sensation. Many people, however, have handled these caterpillars without any such reaction.

In mid-June, the larvae leave the trees to seek sheltered pupation sites, such as among the needles, bark, and under the eaves of houses. The dirty-brown cocoons are constructed from silk and body hairs; inside is a shiny, red-brown pupa. The oval eggs are pea green. They are laid in clusters by the female on needles and twigs of host trees in mid to late summer. The eggs hatch in 10 to 14 days. The small, furry, rusty brown or blackish caterpillars feed on the needles in



Adult silver-spotted tiger moth.

large numbers. They feed well into fall until cold weather begins. The winter is spent as young caterpillars hibernating in the dense webs they spin. Early in the spring they resume their feeding. On warm days you may even find them feeding as early as January. When they are about two-thirds grown, they become less gregarious and begin to disperse and feed throughout the tree singly or in small groups of two or three. Feeding during this period is usually not very harmful to the trees or noticeable since the damage is widely scattered.

Damage

Feeding is restricted to the needles at the ends of the lateral branches. Whole branches are often stripped of their leaves, making individual trees appear quite unsightly at times. Cases of total defoliation are rare. Most commonly, damage

occurs as defoliation in one or a few limbs of a tree. Since the buds are not harmed, the new growth will cover the damaged area by early summer.

Biological Control

In general, the caterpillar is not considered to be a serious pest. They are generally reduced by the same parasitic Tachinid flies that attack tent caterpillars, and these parasites keep populations under control. However, in some years the caterpillars are more numerous and may not be adequately reduced by the parasites.

Chemical Control

There are no chemicals currently registered for control of this insect. Chemical control, however, is rarely warranted.



Mature silver-spotted tiger moth larva.

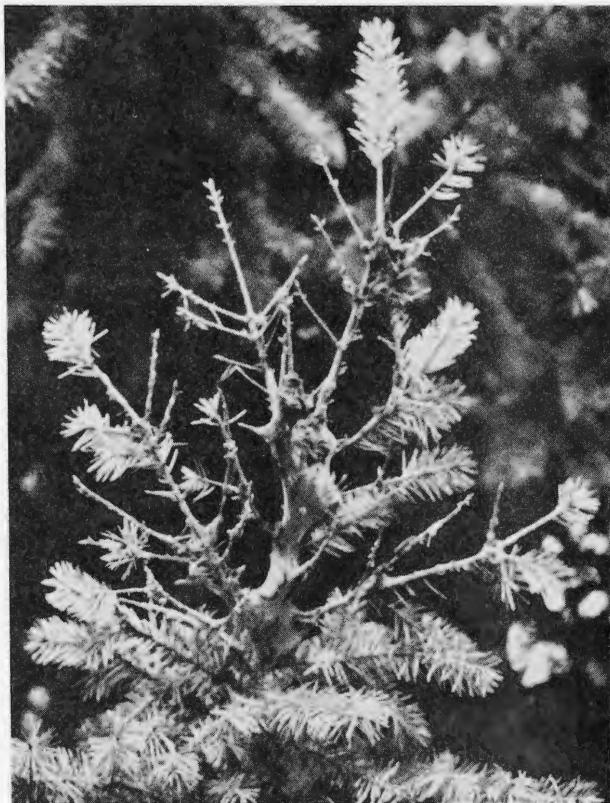


Tiger moth pupa inside cocoon.

Cultural Control

Simple removal of the infested limb, tent, and caterpillars is frequently all that is necessary. If removal of the limbs threatens the tree's sym-

metry, then removal of the caterpillars alone is an option. This is tedious, and practical only with limbs that can be reached. Branches that are too high to prune can be left to recover on their own.



Silver-spotted tiger moth tent.



Silver-spotted tiger moth tent and immature larvae (close-up).

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Assistance from Washington State University is available to all persons, without regard to race, color, or national origin.



Use pesticides with care. Read the label and follow its directions. Never smoke while using pesticides and avoid breathing the spray or dust. Wear natural rubber gloves when handling pesticides. Wash hands and face carefully with soap and water after applying. If insecticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove contaminated clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and be sure labels remain on the containers. Keep containers away from food or feed and out of reach of children or irresponsible persons.

