

CANKERWORMS

Dan Horton

Department of Entomology
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602

Sam Hudson

Department of Entomology
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29634

Cankerworms (fall cankerworm, *Alsophila pometaria* (Harris); spring cankerworm, *Paleacrita vernata* (Peck)) are foliage feeders of many forest, shade, and fruit trees. The larvae are called measuring worms, inchworms, or loopers because they arch their bodies when crawling. In poorly sprayed orchards, cankerworms occasionally cause significant defoliation. Serious damage can occur, even in commercial orchards, if high populations of larvae are present in early spring before insecticide sprays are applied.

The spring cankerworm is the most common species in the Southeast. It overwinters as a pupa in the soil. Moths begin to emerge in February. Wingless female moths generally crawl up the tree trunk, mate, and lay masses of eggs under loose bark or in other protected places. Larvae hatching from the eggs immediately move to and feed on unfolding buds or foliage. Substantial injury to flower buds and blooms can occur if high numbers of cankerworms are present and uncontrolled. They feed for three to four weeks, crawl to the ground, and change to the pupal stage, where they remain until the following year. There is only one generation per year. On the rare occasions when damaging levels of spring cankerworm are likely, an insecticide spray in the pink bud stage may be needed. In small plantings, egg laying can be reduced by placing sticky bands around tree trunks in late January to capture emerging wingless female moths. The bands should be left in place until May.