

## Tent Caterpillars

Q - Master Gardeners, I have black and gold caterpillars with white dots crawling all over webs in my barberry bushes. Are they beneficial for the environment or are they pests? I have seen this before on my barberry bushes, but not to this extent so I have never given it much attention. They've all but decimated the bushes this year. You could actually hear the munching. It was a creep show and I still get the willies thinking about it. Will my barberry recover? Is there anything I can do to prevent this from happening again? I included pictures that I hope will help with identification.

A - These beasts are tent caterpillars, and they are a common pest in Tennessee every year. They form web-like tents around the junctions of tree branches where the eggs hatch and become voracious caterpillars that can completely defoliate young trees and shrubs. Fortunately, they only visit and eat once a year during August here in Tennessee.

Non-chemical control of these pests is by the following means: 1) Removal and destruction of the web by hand; 2) Pruning the limbs with the "tent" and destroying them; 3) Finding and destroying the egg masses before spring. The egg masses are foamy-like black rings around a twig; and 4) Eliminating wild cherry trees from your yard. The pests are attracted to these trees then they migrate to your other trees.

Chemical treatments may be done, also, if desired. Refer to this University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service Pamphlet SP341N for a list of chemicals that are recommended for elimination of these pests:

[https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=utk\\_agexgard](https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=utk_agexgard).

This pamphlet also contains detailed information regarding these insects.

Hope this helps you keep your Barberry leaves intact next year. They should recover if they are healthy. They had defoliated about two limbs from a six-foot oak sapling when I got to them in my yard. It is doing okay now.

Thanks for the great question!

The Northeast Tennessee Master Gardeners