



## Question of the Week

**Q:** Our backyard has been infested with little green worms. So many, in fact, that we had to put a tent over our back porch to avoid being bombarded with them while enjoying our yard. What are they?

**A:** According to Kyle Lombard, forest health specialist with the N.H. Division of Forests and Lands, these nuisance pests are probably cankerworms. He's reported a considerable amount of defoliation in the southeastern part of the state. Numerous species of cankerworms (also known as inchworms and loopers) attack deciduous trees and shrubs in New Hampshire. Both fall and spring cankerworms feed on a wide variety of trees, including apple, ash, beech, elm, hickory, linden, maples, and oaks.

Mature larvae of the fall cankerworm are about 1 inch long and vary from light green to black, with light yellow lines on the sides and a dark dorsal stripe. Mature larvae of the spring cankerworm are 4/5 to 1 1/2 inches long and range in color from reddish to yellowish brown, yellowish green, or black. The head is light and mottled with a yellow stripe along each side of the body. Coloring of both loopers varies with population density.

Young larvae chew small, irregular holes in young leaves or skeletonize them. As the larvae mature, they eat larger holes and, finally, entire leaves, except for the major veins. Low populations won't damage healthy trees but high populations can defoliate trees. Most healthy deciduous trees can come back after a complete defoliation.

Many of the cankerworms and loopers spin down from the trees on strands of silk as they prepare to pupate. This is the invasion that you're experiencing now. Although it's too late to control this invasion, if you call the toll free number listed below, we'll give you information on preventing the next one.

*Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at [answers@unh.edu](mailto:answers@unh.edu)*