Mountain Ash Sawfly

Pristiphora geniculata (Hartig); Family: Tenthredinidae

Young larvae feeding gregariously.
Photo from www.forestryimages.org
Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service.

Mature larva.
Photo from
www.forestryimages.org
James B. Hanson,
USDA Forest Service.

Injury

The mountain ash sawfly can defoliate a tree in a short time when it is present in large numbers. The European and American mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia* and *S. americana*) are the known hosts. Damage can be seen in late June or early July. The larvae feed on the leaves and devour all but the mid-ribs and larger veins.

Description

The larval stage of this wasp causes the damage. At first glance, sawfly larvae resemble caterpillars of moths or butterflies, but sawflies have more pairs of leglike appendages. The young mountain ash sawfly larvae are greenish with black dots down the sides, and with black legs and a head. As they reach maturity, the head and legs become distinctively yellow-orange. The larvae feed gregariously.

The adult sawfly is a stout-shaped wasp, and is yellow with black spots. Pupae are tan to brown, oval in shape, and are found on the ground under the tree.

Life History

In late May or early June adult sawflies emerge from the overwintering cocoons, and the females begin to lay eggs in slits cut into the leaf edges. The tiny larvae begin feeding as soon as they hatch from the eggs, and they increase gradually in size over the next three to four weeks. When the larvae are fully grown, they drop to the ground and spin cocoons. There is usually one generation per year, but at times, a partial second generation may occur. The larvae feed in groups starting on one or two branches, but soon moving on to others as the food source is depleted.

Management

For small trees, remove larvae by hand, by clipping or pulling off infested leaves.

Where this is not possible, insecticides may be applied as soon as the first larvae are seen, usually in early to mid-June (448-707 GDD*), PPI (Plant Phenology Index) when cranberry bush or mock orange are flowering. If you had damage this past year, make a note on your calendar to check the trees in June and July of the coming year for the presence of larvae. Scout weekly in July and August for the possibility of second generation, and if needed treat when larvae appear.

*GDD = Growing Degree Days (Base 50°F). Your local radio station may make this information available, or see this website: http://www.nrcc.cornell.edu/grass/degreedays/degreedays.html

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http://www.entomology.cornell.edu/cals/entomology/extension/idl/idlfactsheetlist.cfm