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Webbed Trees: Too Early for Halloween

Whether you're driving the highway or walking your neighborhood, you've probably noticed that Kansas trees are in the spirit for Halloween. Unlike the flashy decorative spiderwebs, the brown webbing found on trees in the summer and fall are a nuisance caused by insects. They are caused by two insects: fall webworms and eastern tent caterpillars. As the name suggests, the webs we see now are from fall webworms, with eastern tent caterpillars being active earlier in the year.

As you pass by affected trees, you'll notice the webbed 'sacs' clinging to the end branches. These are actually the nests for the larva of the insect, the 'worm' in its name. The larvae will remain in the nest as they grow, consuming leaves in the webbed portion. Typically, Kansas can see two generations in a year. Fall webworms will look like green caterpillars with black or red spots, called tubercles, and lots of yellow hairs.

These spooky web sacs can show up on many different trees that the webworm favorites. In Southeast Kansas, we're likely to find them on red oaks, pecan, ash, birch and redbud. However, they can affect many more species of non-evergreen trees.

Unless the tree is severely infected, picture a fully wrapped mummy, the damage to affected trees is minimal. While the worms will feed on leaves, they are contained in the nest and you will only lose part of a branch or two. Treating fall webworms is best done with physical removal: trim back parts of the tree limb that have webbing and burn them. There are chemical insecticides that affect fall webworm, that would need higher pressure spraying or physical disturbance of the nest.

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