



# Silver-Spotted Tiger Moth

## Forest Health Fact Sheet

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Christine Buhl, ODF

Silver-spotted tiger moth caterpillars have variations of brown, black, yellow and white tufts of hair

Silver-spotted tiger moth (*Lophocampa argentata*) is a type of defoliating caterpillar of a moth from a group that includes tussock moths and the black and orange caterpillars commonly known as ‘woolly bears’. Like various other woolly bear species, silver-spotted tiger moth caterpillars are one of the few insects that are active in fall and winter months. Feeding begins in fall and overwintered caterpillars resume feeding the following spring. The primary host for these caterpillars is Douglas-fir, although damage is only cosmetic and not known to cause reduction in growth or tree mortality.

### Hosts

- Major: Douglas-fir
- Minor: true fir, spruce, pine

The range of this species spans from Canada to northern Mexico and includes most states west of New Mexico.



Margarethe Brummerman

Wings have silvery spots and span up to 2 inches

### Biology

Females lay green eggs in clusters, on twigs and needles of host trees from July - August. Larvae hatch about 3 weeks later and feed together while forming loose



Erika Britten, WA-DNR

Webbing and defoliated branches

webbing on branches. Larvae overwinter in these webs and may continue to feed during warmer, winter days. Active feeding resumes in the spring and caterpillars disperse to feed individually around May - June. Larvae have clusters of brown, black and yellow hairs and may reach just under 4 cm in length. From June - August, caterpillars spin brown cocoons covered in their shed hairs and silk webbing, which are attached to trees or litter on the ground. As with many tiger moth species, the adults are striking. Adults are 4-5 cm with tan/brown forewings covered in silvery spots. There is one generation per year. Adults do not feed.

## Damage

Silver-spotted caterpillar defoliation usually occurs on a few scattered trees and infestations do not spread or persist. Population peaks typically collapse within 1 - 2 years. Feeding on individual trees usually only strips a few branches of needles. Buds and newly-flushed foliage are left untouched. Attacked trees flush normally the following spring.



Beth Willhite, USFS

Branch partially defoliated by silver-spotted caterpillars

## Human Health Concerns

Larvae are covered with tiny irritating hairs that may produce a temporary allergic skin reaction that causes rashes or welts.



Dina Pavlis

Silver-spotted caterpillars feeding together

## Management highlights

- Prune and dispose of webs containing caterpillars (be careful not to over prune)
- Biological insecticides have shown efficacy with limited non-target impacts

## Management

Although damage from this insect can be unsightly, control is not often warranted because damage is cosmetic and short-lived.

### Natural

Populations are kept in check by natural predators such as parasitic flies (Tachinidae) and wasps (*Ophion* spp.).

### Silvicultural

For high-value trees, infested branches containing caterpillars may be removed although removal of branches may be more damaging to trees.

### Insecticides

Spraying silver-spotted caterpillar infestations is rarely, if ever, warranted. For the rare cases in which it might be deemed necessary to reduce damage to high-value trees, insecticides are most effective against young (small) larvae and should be applied as soon as the infestation is noticed. Biological insecticides such as *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (Btk) have shown to be effective. Pesticides registered for use on silver-spotted tiger moths can be found in the Pesticide Center Online (PICOL) database.

When using pesticides, always read and follow the label

## More information:

Oregon Dept. of Forestry, Forest Health  
<http://tinyurl.com/odf-foresthealth>  
2600 State St. Bldg. D, Salem, OR 97310  
503-945-7200

## Other references:

USFS Forest Health Protection  
[www.fs.usda.gov/goto/fhp/fidls](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/fhp/fidls)

OSU Forestry Extension  
<http://extensionweb.forestry.oregonstate.edu/>