

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for What's Up 08-06-03 and Bremerton Patriot) , ©2005

This time of year we're out in our gardens weaving, bobbing and shaking to miss or remove the sticky webs of our common orb weaving golden-brown garden spider. The Latin name for this fascinating creature is *Araneus diadematus*. The best thing about them is they are as startled as we are when we collide with their webs and will immediately drop to the ground or attach to a waiting leaf or stem.

This spider's favorite place to weave a web is across a porch entry or path. You'll also find them on window frames. It's actually fascinating to watch them gather up and respin their web. The web loses its stickiness and must be consumed and respun each day. The web is made out of particles of protein and scientists think ingesting the web gives the spider energy to spin another.

I've come to admire and like these agile, patient creatures. You can actually reach out and unhook the web anchors and move webs aside. The orb weaver spider is our friend. Our gardens would be over-run with pesky flying creatures if it weren't for this spider. Their favorite food is white flies, moths, sawflies, craneflies, mosquitoes and even dampwood termites.

Our local entomologists at Bangor maintain an excellent website on insects called "Bug of the Month." Visit <http://www.ndvecc.navy.mil/pubs/botm.php> to read about insects. "Bugs of Washington and Oregon" by John Acorn and Ian Sheldon published by Lone Pine features the most common insects and spiders found in our area. The photos are excellent and you'll easily recognize many critters when thumbing through this book. Timber Press seems to develop and sell the "cadillacs" of gardening books. Visit your favorite bookstore or local library and check out "Insects and Gardens" by Eric Grissell with excellent photos by Carll (CORRECT SPELLING) Goodpasture. If you really want to delve into entomology this book fits the bill.

I'd be remiss if I didn't briefly revisit the tent caterpillar issue. This year the tent-caterpillar egg cases are ranging in color from dusky brown to charcoal gray. Look in your garden checking out all the previous areas damaged by the tent caterpillars and you'll probably find the egg casings. Peel them off and throw them in the trash. It will be your way of alleviating some of the caterpillar damage next year. Check again when the trees loose their leaves and remove more egg casings.

On a very hopeful note. Caterpillars take seven to ten days to turn into moths and emerge from the cocoons. At our home in the north end of the county we only had one flush of moths emerging around the 4th of July. All the rest of the cocoons seem to be sterile and no moths have emerged. Early in the season if these cocoons were squeezed it was quite satisfying to see the green guts oozing out. Now if you squeeze the cocoons there is still a caterpillar remaining, but it never fully turned into a moth. Hopefully nature is coming back into balance. We'll know for sure in the spring.

If you did not purchase Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) during the onslaught you might want to keep a watch on shelves at local hardware and garden centers. Bt has a shelf life of three to five years. You can stock up now for use in the spring. Start spraying with Bt in early March and continue, according to label directions through April and May as the sequenced hatches of tent caterpillars emerge. Remember to dedicate a sprayer only to Bt. You will not want to use an applicator that was used for any other purpose. Label your sprayer and keep it stored in a safe place for future use. Always follow the label directions.

People are also concerned about moths eating clothing or plants. Moths drink nectar with their tongues and pollinate. It is the larvae (caterpillars and worms) that do the damage. The larvae are the eating machines in this family of the insect world, not the moths. So if you're finding holes in your vegetables or clothes, look for the caterpillars, not for the moths.

In the fall don't panic when you start seeing fresh tents in your trees – this caterpillar is the fall webworm. These larvae stay mostly in their tents and only consume the vegetation enclosed in the tent. You won't need to do anything about them unless you want to prune the unsightly tents off the trees, seal them in a plastic bag and put them in the garbage. Fall webworms do very little damage so don't worry when you notice them in September through October.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or via email at ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us or gardenmentor@yahoo.com