

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

# OPEROPHTERA BRUMATA



If you are like me, you can't pronounce it and don't know what it is. **Operophtera Brumata** is commonly known as *winter moth*. You saw these moths many, many times in late November and December when they emerged to mate. They were on your windows, exterior walls, and outdoor lights. If you drove your car at night, it looked like it was "snowing" moths. The hard frost saw an end to them. You probably figured they were gone so now you could forget about them.

## DON'T FORGET ABOUT THEM.

State entomologists estimate that **there are 3.4 trillion winter moths in eastern Massachusetts**. They have been in Rockport for the past few years in



great numbers. In March or April, the eggs they laid will emerge as little green worms and will eat the both the leaf buds and flower buds of your cherry, maple, oak, apple, and crabapple trees, as well as your blueberry bushes. **Actually no deciduous trees are safe.** The worms may drop down from the trees onto your rose bushes or perennials and feed on them as well. The short-term damage is lacy-looking leaves. What your trees can't tell you is that they will become stressed if left untreated. U. Mass-Amherst studies indicate that trees left untreated for as little as four years are in danger of **serious branch dieback and mortal consequences for the tree.**



## WHAT IS BEING DONE?



The best approach currently available is to restore balance and control. Dr. Joe Elkington of U.Mass is releasing the beneficial fly, *Cyzans albicans*, in amounts of at least a thousand per site across the state. Eventually the population of the good bug will be high enough to bring the damaging caterpillars under control. This technique has worked in Nova Scotia since the 1950s. Testing to monitor the progress is on-going. But for now...



## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

**Recommended treatment** for winter moth is a two-pronged approach. First **organic horticultural oil** is applied in March/April. This smothers the eggs before they hatch. This is a contact spray. Since it isn't possible to reach all the egg masses, a second procedure is needed. The larvae that hatch climb inside flower and leaf buds and begin to eat. When the buds are open sufficiently, a second spray is applied. This is a **fermented bacteria** that kills by both contact and ingestion. Both treatments are organic.



Please send me an email at [ganderson8945@comcast.net](mailto:ganderson8945@comcast.net) if you would like a referral to a company that provides this service.

Email your questions or topics of concern and the Horticulture Committee will be happy to address them.

Happy Gardening!

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