

# Early Winter 2025 Tree Notes: It's time to look around for Browntail Moth!

By Yarmouth's Tree Warden, Scott Couture

The winter months are a good time to identify and locate Browntail moth nests in your trees.

Browntail moth is an invasive species to Maine. Contact with the caterpillars of this moth can cause a severe rash that is difficult to treat. The nests, shown here, are a white/gray typically triangular shaped durable woven silk structure located in the tops of trees. They can also be located in lower parts of the tree, but always near to the ends of the branches. These nests do not contain eggs, but actual baby caterpillars who will cluster tightly together to better endure hostile winter conditions.

In the early spring, they will emerge just in time to devour the first tender leaves the tree will produce. These little pests have preferences. They love fruit trees, especially apple. Their next preference is oak trees and have been known to consume every leaf on the tree. A couple of nests on a large oak would not be enough to completely denude the tree. However, even a few caterpillars raining down on your porch or play area could cause a very nasty rash.

Other tree species that I have seen Browntail nests in, but not in great numbers are maple, elm, birch, and poplar. The good news for Yarmouth is the population of Browntail appears to be in decline- this year.

As the Tree Warden, I have been scanning our tree canopy closely thus far and have noticed a significant decline in nests in areas where I had seen dense infestations in previous years. Royal River Park, the majestic oaks in front of the library, numerous flowering crab and other fruit trees around town are looking nearly free of nests. Last year, Camp Soci was heavily infested, but we were able to get them effectively treated early, keeping our campers safe.

This year, I have not been able to locate nests at Camp SOCI. There are likely still pockets of caterpillar nests in town and it's important to know what can be done to prevent the ill effects of the Browntail moth caterpillar.

The first step in dealing with the dreaded Browntail is proper identification. Take the time to study the photos and others to be found online. Once you have identified the nests in your yard, you can evaluate what types of treatments may be appropriate for you. If you have only a few nests on small fruit trees, you would be safe to wear a pair of gloves and with a sharp pair of pruners clip the branch holding the nests. You can then submerge them in a bucket of warm soapy water overnight. Burying them would work, but the ground is frozen now. If it is only a few nests, they can be added to your household garbage. Should you have more than a few nests or they are out of reach, consider hiring a service to come and clip them out of your trees for you. There are several companies offering these services and this would be the most environmentally friendly option.

If the infestation is extensive, involving multiple large trees, please consider contacting a professional tree service. If you choose the route of using pesticides, please make sure the company will oversee their projects with a Licensed Pesticide Applicator. They will be most qualified to provide you with effective means of dealing with your Browntail problems.

There are a few treatment options currently available. Trunk injections, soil injections and foliar applications can be used depending on your needs and proximity to water sources. There are organic options as well. For those concerned about the effects on bees, there are bee friendly products and application timing that can be used to keep our bees safe. I highly advise anyone interested in hiring a tree service to contact them as soon as possible, as they are scheduling treatments for the spring right now.

Timing of treatment is important to best protect yourself and your trees from these nasty pests. If anyone is having difficulty with identification of the nests or has other questions regarding trees, please contact me and I will be happy to meet with you.

With any questions or concerns regarding any tree issue in town please contact Yarmouth Parks, Recreation, and Community Services at 846-2406 or email me at [treewarden@yarmouth.me.us](mailto:treewarden@yarmouth.me.us).

Sincerely,

Scott Couture  
Yarmouth Tree Warden