

# Redbud Leaffolder

## Insect Pest of Eastern Redbud

Redbud leaffolder, *Fascista cercerisella*, is an insect pest native to the United States that feeds exclusively on the eastern redbud, *Cercis canadensis*. This publication discusses the biology, damage, and management of the redbud leaffolder.

### Biology

The redbud leaffolder life cycle includes an egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Adults are ¼ of an inch (6.3 millimeters) long, black to brown, with a white head, and black and white bands on the legs. There are approximately five white markings on each of the wings (Figure 1). Adults are present in the spring (April to May) with adult females laying oval, white eggs on leaves near the veins. Young larvae (caterpillars) that emerge (eclose) from the eggs are ¼ of an inch (6.3 millimeters) in length, initially white (Figure 2), and then turn light green. Older caterpillars are ½ of an inch (12.7 millimeters) long with alternating



Figure 1. Adult redbud leaffolder (Photo: Bugwood Moths of North Carolina).

bands of white and black on the body (Figure 3). Redbud leaffolders overwinter as pupae within the folds of fallen leaves on the surface of the soil. There are three generations per year in Kansas.

### Damage

Redbud leaffolder caterpillars fold the upper edges of leaves and then fasten the leaves together with white strands of silk (Figure 4). Caterpillars feed on the leaf surface within the folded leaves, causing the leaves to turn brown (Figure 5). Extensive infestations may cause the leaves of eastern redbud trees and shrubs to drop prematurely.



Figure 2. Young redbud leaffolder caterpillar (Photo: Raymond Cloyd).



Figure 3. Older redbud leaffolder caterpillar (Photo: Raymond Cloyd).

## Management

Redbud leaffolder management involves scouting, removing folded leaves on eastern redbud trees and shrubs, cleaning up fallen leaves on the soil surface, and/or applying insecticides. Check eastern redbud trees and shrubs at least once per week in the spring for the presence of young redbud leaffolder caterpillars by looking at the topside of leaves or looking for folded leaves. When the leaves are pulled apart, the caterpillars move quickly and fall off the leaves. Black fecal material may be present inside the folded leaves (Figure 6). Redbud leaffolder caterpillars or folded leaves can be removed by hand and placed into a container of soapy water to kill the caterpillars. Clean up leaves on the soil surface in the fall to remove overwintering pupae.

Redbud leaffolder caterpillars are difficult to manage with insecticide spray applications because the caterpillars reside and feed within folded leaves, which protects the caterpillars from exposure to insecticide applications. Consequently, apply insecticides when caterpillars are first detected with additional applications when needed. Cover the upper leaf surface thoroughly and apply enough volume so that the spray solution contacts the caterpillars inside the folded leaves.



Figure 5. Brown folded leaves associated with redbud leaffolder caterpillars (Photo: Raymond Cloyd).



Figure 4. White silken strands that hold folded leaves together (Photo: Raymond Cloyd).



Figure 6. Black fecal material inside folded leaves (Photo: Raymond Cloyd).

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