

YELLOW HEADED SPRUCE SAWFLY

Newly hatched larvae of the Spruce Sawfly have a yellowish head and a light greenish-yellow body. In colour and size, the larvae look just like young spruce needles. This can make them hard to see. Note that they are found most commonly on Colorado spruce but do attack white spruce too.



Adult Sawflies emerge from overwintering cocoons in late May and early June. Wasp-like females deposit their eggs near new buds and the eggs hatch when the needles first appear.

The larvae feed on new growth, easily stripping the needles down to nubs, they then move onto older growth. The loss of needles can retard tree growth and repeated attacks can kill the tree.

After feeding for the summer, mature larvae drop to the duff beneath the tree to spin cocoons and overwinter. One way to break the lifecycle is to disturb the duff and soil beneath the tree in early spring to expose the cocoons and hopefully kill some of the adults.

Reducing tree stress is the first line of defense. Mulching will help conserve water and provide nutrients, which promotes root growth “Healthy Roots Make Healthy Shoots”. Place 3-4 inches of mulch around the base of the tree at least 4 feet in diameter or to the drip line, being careful not to bury the trunk. The larger the mulched area the better the tree will perform. Water the tree slowly and thoroughly around the drip line when rain is limited and water in well before winter. Watering at a slow rate (trickle) for longer periods encourages roots to grow deeper where soil moisture is generally higher and more stable.

Larvae can be handpicked or washed off with a strong water spray from the hose. If populations are heavy, the larvae can be killed with an application of an insecticide. Please be advised that it is recommended to consult with an arborist for chemical control methods.

Please check your spruce trees and together we can help reduce populations of this pest.

For more information, contact the Urban Forester at 403-938-8958.