

BOX TREE MOTH

The movement of ornamental plants and produce across the world has steadily increased as global trade in perishable goods became increasingly quicker and more viable. However, it also increased the potential for non-native plant pests to move to new countries.

These invasive species invariably arrive in new locations without the predators and parasites that would usually keep them under control in their native countries, and so it often provides them with an opportunity to rapidly increase in numbers and freely disperse.

Already British growers and gardeners have witnessed the appearance and establishment of many invasive species over recent decades, which include the Red Lily beetle, Western Flower thrips, Horse Chestnut leafminer and the Spanish slug. And more recently, during 2011, the invasive **Box Tree moth**.

A native to East Asia the Box Tree moth is a medium sized moth, recognisable by its white wings that have an iridescent brown border. It is now being recorded throughout much of England, Wales and Ireland.



The Box Tree moth lays its eggs exclusively on Buxus trees where its caterpillars feed gregariously on the leaves within a protective mass of webbing which they eventually pupate within.

The damage that the caterpillars cause can result in severe defoliation and dieback, and so this pest is not only a serious concern for Britain's topiarists, but could potentially change the appearance of the country's many historic formal gardens.



Although the Box Tree moth's biology is not yet fully understood, it is thought that up to three generations can occur each year, and that through the winter months it survives as small caterpillars hidden and protected within their webbing.

Controlling Box Tree moth infestations that have become established within a mass of webbing is often difficult since the caterpillars are not easily accessible, and this has unfortunately led to the use of broad-spectrum insecticides that potentially harm beneficial wildlife such as pollinators and predatory beetles.

It's therefore welcome news to find that a new product is now available for use against Box Tree moths, that offers protection by preventing the establishment of an infestation without harming the beneficial wildlife. Used as a regular spray, the formulation of natural plant oils has been shown to discourage the Box Tree moth caterpillars from feeding on the treated leaves, and that they move away to find an alternative source of food. It's also been shown that where Box Tree moth caterpillars have become established, a regular programme of applications onto and into the affected areas suppresses the infestation and enables the infested tree to recover. With the important need for home gardens to become safe havens for Britain's native wildlife, this product will be of great value.