



Sustainable Scarborough: Browntail Moth – What's the Risk in Scarborough?

We've heard a lot about browntail moths in the news and from friends and family over the past few months. The issue is with the caterpillars that turn into the moths. The caterpillar's tiny hairs are poisonous and cause an itchy, painful rash (similar to a poison ivy rash) if they come into contact with skin. The rash can develop from direct contact with the caterpillar or indirect contact with airborne hairs.

Browntail moths build web-like colonies around a leaf at the top of hardwood trees (like oak and fruit trees). The webs are often confused with webs made by fall webworms or eastern tent caterpillars. The Maine Forest Service has information about [identifying browntail moth webs](#) on their website.



Browntail moth caterpillar
Credit: maine.gov

Browntail moth caterpillars hatch in the late summer, overwinter in their webs, and emerge in the spring to feed on leaves. The greatest risk for exposure to browntail moths is between April and late June. Their hairs remain toxic throughout the summer, but as the hairs get washed into the soil, they become less of a problem.

According to the Maine Forest Service, Scarborough only has a trace risk for browntail moth exposure, meaning only a small number of webs were found in trees in town. The Forest Service has an [exposure risk map](#) available on their website.

One of the best ways to deal with the moths is to cut their nests out of trees in the winter while the caterpillars are dormant. If you suspect that you have browntail moth in trees on your property, contact a licensed arborist to help with identification and removal in the winter. The Forest Service website has a [list of arborists who will prune browntail moth nests](#) in the winter.

Learn more about browntail moth by visiting the [Maine Forest Service website](#).