

AZALEA CATERPILLAR (DATANA MAJOR G. & R.)¹
(LEPIDOPTERA:NOTODONTIDAE)
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INTRODUCTION:--THE AZALEA CATERPILLAR IS FOUND IN FLORIDA FROM JULY THROUGH OCTOBER ON AZALEAS (RHODODENDRON SPP.). OFTEN THE CATERPILLARS COMPLETELY DEFOLIATE MUCH OF THE PLANT BEFORE THEY ARE DETECTED. THE CATERPILLAR IS HARMLESS TO HUMANS AND CAN BE HAND PICKED.

DISTRIBUTION AND HOST:--THE CATERPILLAR IS FOUND IN FLORIDA AS FAR SOUTH AS POLK AND HILLSBOROUGH COUNTIES. RHODODENDRON SPP. ARE THE ONLY KNOWN HOSTS IN FLORIDA.



FIG. 1. FIRST INSTAR CATERPILLARS, TWICE NATURAL SIZE. INSERT: MATURE CATERPILLARS. (PHOTOGRAPH BY MILLEDGE MURPHEY, JR., DEPT. OF ENTOMOLOGY, UNIV. OF FLA.)

DESCRIPTION AND FIELD OBSERVATIONS:--EGGS ARE DEPOSITED BY THE FEMALE MOTH IN MASSES OF 80-100 ON THE UNDERSIDE OF THE LEAF. THE FIRST INSTAR CATERPILLARS FEED IN A CLUSTER SIDE BY SIDE UNLESS DISTURBED. THE SEMI-SKELETONIZED LEAVES DRY UP, TURN BROWN, AND REMAIN ON THE PLANT FOR SEVERAL DAYS. THE FIRST INSTAR CATERPILLAR IS APPROXIMATELY $3/8$ INCH LONG AFTER FEEDING FOR EIGHT TO TEN HOURS. IT IS YELLOW WITH SEVEN RED LONGITUDINAL STRIPES AND HAS A BLACK HEAD. IF DISTURBED SOME OF THE CATERPILLARS DROP ONE OR TWO INCHES BELOW THE INFESTED LEAF AND HANG BY A SILKEN THREAD. THE MATURE CATERPILLAR IS ABOUT TWO INCHES LONG AND BLACK WITH EIGHT NEAR-WHITE LONGITUDINAL BROKEN STRIPES; THE HEAD AND LEGS ARE MAHOGANY-RED. THE ADULT MOTH IS LIGHT BROWN WITH A WING EXPANSE OF $1\ 3/4$ INCHES.

¹CONTRIBUTION No. 13, ENTOMOLOGY SECTION.