

# OLEANDER CATERPILLAR MOTH

While this insect may look like a bright-colored wasp, it is actually a moth (many moths mimic wasps, but you can tell the difference by their antennae). However, it is the caterpillar stage rather than the adult that is of concern. The oleander caterpillar is a bright orange caterpillar with tufts of long black hairs, and is a common sight on oleanders in Florida and southern Georgia. In southern regions of Florida, the oleander caterpillar can cause considerable defoliation. It is a year-round inhabitant of south Florida and the Keys, but is usually killed by cold winter temperatures in north and north-central Florida, recolonizing these areas the following spring.



LARVE / CATERPILLAR  
SIZE |-----|  
Up to 1½ inches



ADULT  
SIZE |-----|  
Up to 2 inches

Several insect species are able to feed on the oleander caterpillar. Natural enemies include predatory stinkbugs, parasitic flies and wasps, and the red imported fire ant. Predatory stinkbugs have been observed sucking the juices out of oleander larvae. Parasitic flies lay their eggs on large larvae, and wasps lay their eggs on pupae. The progeny of these parasitic insects then devour the oleander caterpillar. Fire ants often discover groups of pupae and eat this immobile life stage. Viral, fungal and bacterial diseases of this caterpillar can be quite prevalent in certain years and have a disastrous effect on oleander caterpillar populations. Pathogen-infected larvae are often dark in color, flaccid and easily "liquefied". While these pathogen-infected larvae may look "gross", leaving them on the oleander bushes will allow the beneficial disease to spread within the oleander caterpillar population.

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