

## Bougainvillea Chewers

Doug Caldwell, Ph.D. ■ U.F. Commercial Landscape Horticulture Extension, Collier County

There are at least two common caterpillars that feed on this host. One is a leaftier (ties two or more leaves together with silk threads, forming a tube in which to hide and feed) and the other is a looper or inchworm which resembles a twig.

If your bougainvillea has bare twigs where there used to be foliage take a closer look, as these caterpillars are hard to find!

The leaftier lines the edges of the leaves with silken threads from its spinnerets, as the silk dries the leaf folds tighter and the green caterpillar is enclosed in a protective hideout. One usually sees the frass before they find the caterpillar. The other common defoliator is a green or brown looper, so called from its measured cadence as it crawls along. This one feeds on the leaves at the end of the branches at night and hides in the thicker foliage during the day. Entire sections of shrubs may be defoliated, but it is only a temporary eyesore, as they will resprout.

**What to do:** The photo shows that there are spiders that will feed on these caterpillars. Other predators include various wasps. Unless large

sections are being defoliated, it is probably best to let the landscape fauna battle it out.

If foliage consumption exceeds your aesthetic tolerance threshold, try using a soft pesticide that contains either *Bacillus thuringiensis* or spinosad. These products are selective for caterpillars and our beneficial arthropods won't suffer from the "friendly fire" of broad spectrum pesticides. Use bifenthrin or carbaryl if under severe attack. 🐜



A crab spider has neutralized this bougainvillea looper. Note the chewed up leaves caused by the night feeding looper.



This leaftier caterpillar hides inside the folded leaf. Look for piles of caterpillar frass as a sign of its presence.



The looper or inchworm.



The looper resembles a twig when it is at rest.