

Gypsy Moth

2006 Control Recommendations



Description

Gypsy moth caterpillars are black and very hairy when they first hatch in May. Once they reach about an inch long their characteristic 6 pairs of red dots and 5 pairs of blue dots appear in a row down their backs. They grow to 2" long before pupating in early July.

Gypsy moths are often confused with tent caterpillars and fall webworms but they do **not** make any kind of webby nest. Bring a sample to our office for a free identification.

Damage and Occurrence

The caterpillars devour the leaves of a wide range of trees their favorites being oak, apple and maple. In years of severe outbreaks large swaths of forests will be completely defoliated by late June. Once they pupate in early July no more damage is done that year. The adults do not eat and live only a few days.

In most years in our region only a few caterpillars are seen. Serious outbreaks of gypsy moths have occurred in our region twice in the last 20-plus years; in the early 1980's and again in the early 1990's. We've been expecting another outbreak since 2000 but so far our region has not been hit hard.

Life Cycle

The gypsy moth overwinters as eggs laid in masses on tree trunks and branches. The caterpillars hatch in early May as the leaves unfold. They devour leaves and quickly grow, reaching 2" in length before pupating in early July. At this point no further damage is done to trees for the rest of the season. Adult moths emerge in late July to mate, lay eggs and then die. There is one generation per year.

Control

In most years damage is barely noticeable and no control is necessary. In years of severe outbreak valuable landscape trees may be treated with Bt (short for *Bacillus thuringiensis*) sold as Dipel, Thuricide and Safer Brand Caterpillar Killer when the caterpillars are extremely small. Once they are more than ¾" to 1" long this treatment is not as effective. Bt degrades within hours in the sun and must be eaten by the caterpillar. Infected caterpillars stop feeding but take a couple of days to die. Other products include Sevin (containing carbaryl) and malathion. Check the label to make sure your plant and this pest is listed.

Lake Friendly Gardening Tip – Think Before You Spray!

Unless the outbreak is severe, most trees can co-exist with a few gypsy moths. When the population explodes you can protect your valuable trees with a carefully timed spray of

Bt. Bt has specific directions to be effective – read the label carefully and follow the directions exactly. Contact us with any questions before spraying.

In a bad year you can also catch quite a few caterpillars with a sticky band or burlap trap wrapped around the tree trunk. Contact us for more details.

PESTICIDE DISCLAIMER: Every effort has been made to provide correct, complete and up-to-date pesticide recommendations. Nevertheless, changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly, human errors are still possible. These recommendations are not a substitute for pesticide labeling. Please read the label before applying any pesticide and follow the directions exactly.

*Prepared by Amy Ivy
May 2006*