

Timberlake Civic Association Gypsy Moth Information



Gary Majeski

Each destroyed egg mass represents hundreds of caterpillars that won't be a problem next spring.

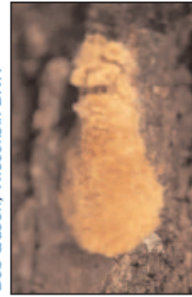
The gypsy moth was introduced to North America in 1869. It has since become one of the most important insect pests of forest and shade trees in the eastern United States. Gypsy moth is now established in eastern Wisconsin and continues to move westward.

Approximately every 10 years the gypsy moth population

explodes to very high numbers. During these outbreaks, the caterpillars strip trees of their leaves, defoliating neighborhoods or even entire forests in late June. While most healthy trees can survive a single defoliation, trees that are already stressed or which suffer drought or other damage that same summer may die. At their peak, the sheer numbers of caterpillars crawling all over becomes an annoyance, and can lead some people to try remedies that can be more damaging to the environment and themselves than the outbreak itself!

You can predict whether an outbreak will cause defoliation of your trees 9 months before it will happen by counting the number of egg masses on your trees in the fall. The egg stage of the gypsy moth is also the easiest one for homeowners to attack and kill large numbers of gypsy moth, helping reduce the pest population and damage the following spring.

Identification



Bob Queen, Wisconsin DNR

Egg mass shown at actual size



Linda Williams, Wisconsin DNR

Comparison of old and new egg masses

Gypsy moth egg masses are the life stage most frequently observed. They remain in place from the time they are laid in August and persist well after caterpillars hatch in May. Egg masses are typically teardrop shaped and about 1–2 inches long. They contain all the eggs a female moth produces, typically 600–1000 for a healthy female. Egg masses are a buff yellow-brown color, similar to the color of a manila folder. They look like they're made of a rounded pad of felt and are firm to the touch. The mass will persist after the eggs have hatched in May, sometimes into the following winter. These empty masses are bleached, often torn up, and are soft and spongy to the touch.

Egg masses can be found in any protected location. They can be found on logs or debris on the forest floor to the tops of trees. On trees, egg masses are often found in cracks in bark, on the underside of large branches, under peeling bark or in holes. Log or rock piles are other favorite spots to hide egg masses. Female moths will also place egg masses on lawn furniture and play sets, behind shutters, underneath tree houses, beneath lower rows of shingles and under soffits on homes and garages. The spread of gypsy moth has been accelerated by egg masses laid on travel trailers and campers.

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Management

Each egg mass destroyed represents several hundred caterpillars that won't be a problem for you next spring. The following steps can reduce gypsy moth numbers and damage on isolated trees and properties, but cannot prevent defoliation over wider areas or in woodlands.

1. **Remove objects around the yard that may harbor gypsy moth egg masses.** Cut out dead branches and trees. Remove signs, decorations, or birdhouses nailed to trees or siding. Get rid of trash and debris such as barrels, cans, old tires, or unused structures like old tree houses or sheds.
2. **In late fall or winter carefully inspect trees and structures for egg masses.** Examine all surfaces on tool sheds, garages, tree houses, as well as stone walls, woodpiles, and fencing for hidden egg masses. Also check play equipment, lawn chairs, and other yard furniture for egg masses before storing them for the winter.
3. **If you find any masses you'll need to take action (spray or scrape) by mid-April before larvae begin to hatch.**

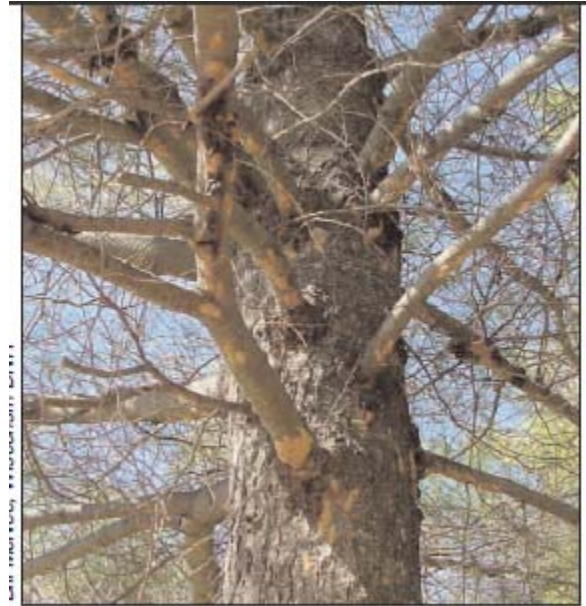


Photo: Forest Service, Pennsylvania State University

—Physically remove the egg masses. Scrape the egg masses into a jar and microwave on high for 2 minutes or cover them with soapy water for at least 2 days to kill the eggs. Be sure to kill the eggs, as masses just scraped onto the ground will survive to hatch in May. Wear gloves when handling the egg masses as the hairs in the "felt" can cause skin rashes.



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