

Gypsy Moths: Q & A

The following section is designed to provide concerned residents with information that should prove useful in identification and control of this costly pest.

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Q: What Do Gypsy Moths Look Like?

A: Like all insects, gypsy moths take on different forms as their life cycle progresses. The gypsy moth life cycle has four (4) stages:

. The Egg Stage

Gypsy moths spend the vast majority of their lives, (8-9 months), as eggs. Adult moths lay their eggs in mid to late summer, starting in August. The eggs do not hatch until the following spring, usually in early May. Gypsy moth egg masses are 1-2 square inches in size and are covered with tan to buff colored hairs. Egg masses can be found virtually anywhere, including tree trunks, houses, roofs, cars, and outdoor furniture. Gypsy moth eggs are very hard, and difficult to crush.

. The Larvae Stage

It is only during the larval stage that gypsy moths can damage trees. Gypsy moth larvae, or caterpillars, hatch from eggs in early May. For the next 40 days or so the caterpillars spend most of their time eating leaves. When they first hatch, the caterpillars are about 1/8 of an inch long, but as they continue to feed the caterpillars can reach lengths of 3 inches. The caterpillars look very conspicuous, with large pale heads, and dark hairy bodies. In addition, the backs of the caterpillars are lined with 6 pairs of red dots and 4 pairs of blue dots. The caterpillar stage for gypsy moth ends in late June.

. The Pupae Stage

In late June, gypsy moth caterpillars stop their feeding frenzy and change into pupae. Since the gypsy moths are immobilized while in pupae, the caterpillars usually find a good place to hide before making this change. The pupae are dark brown, shell-like cases, about 1 to 2 inches in length, and sparsely covered with hairs. The pupae stage lasts about 10-14 days, from late June to mid July.

. The Adult Stage

Adult gypsy moths emerge from pupal cases in mid July. The male moths are dark brown to grey, they are good fliers, and have feathery antennae. Female gypsy moths are larger and heavier than the males. They have hairy tan bodies, with cream colored wings. The female gypsy moths do not possess the ability to fly. They lay their eggs as soon as a male finds them, often times just inches from their pupal case. Once the eggs have been laid the adult moths die, and the insect's life cycle is complete.

Q: How Do Gypsy Moths Migrate?

A: As mentioned above, female gypsy moths cannot fly. For this reason, the natural migration of the insect is quite slow. For the most part, gypsy moths move only as far as a gust of wind may carry the caterpillars. Unfortunately, human beings frequently migrate vast distances, and in doing so we often bring a variety of personal items with us on our travels. When gypsy moth egg masses are laid on our cars, campers, or boats we may unknowingly transport hundreds to thousands of leaf eaters to a portion of the country that was previously uninhabited by the pest. Seeing as a single gypsy moth egg mass can contain more than 1,000 eggs, transportation of a mere hand full of egg masses to a non-infested area can result in a thriving population of gypsy moths within two years.

Currently, the Village of Lincolnshire is at the front lines of the battle against the spread of gypsy moth. The insect is becoming established in eastern Wisconsin, northern Indiana ,and the entire state of Michigan. Therefore, it is very important for residents of this area, who travel to Wisconsin, Michigan or anywhere out east to inspect all outdoor items for gypsy moth egg masses before returning to Illinois. Since gypsy moths are already present in this area, residents should also inspect automobiles and recreational vehicles for gypsy moth prior to traveling west or south of the Chicago region. With a little bit of effort everyone can do their part to slow the spread of this destructive pest.

Q: What Do Gypsy Moths Eat?

A: Gypsy moths are leaf eaters, and though they only feed for about 40 days, the results can be devastating. The preferred source of nutrition for the insect is Oak leaves, but they can survive on any of about 500 other types of tree and shrub leaves if oaks are in short supply. This means that when gypsy moth populations are low, as they currently are in our area, the insects will usually be found feeding on Oak trees. As gypsy moth numbers increase they will eat virtually anything that is green. An important fact to remember is that, at low to moderate populations, gypsy moth caterpillars feed at night to avoid being preyed upon by birds and other animals. During the day the caterpillars crawl down the tree to hide, ironically this is when they are most visible, and vulnerable to humans. When populations are high, gypsy moth caterpillars feed non-stop, day and night.

Q: What Do I Do if I Find Gypsy Moths On My Property?

A: In the event that you find signs of gypsy moth on your property (for the first time), the first thing you should do is try to collect the insect or egg mass. Though gypsy moths do not bite or sting, small hairs on their bodies could cause allergies, so care should be taken to keep them away from your eyes, nose, or mouth. Once the insect has been collected, contact the Village

so that the finding can be verified and documented by the Village. This is important since effective control and management of the insect depends greatly on our knowledge of the insect's locations and population. Depending on the level of gypsy moth infestation on your property, the Village will provide you with recommendations and advice for protecting your trees. It is a good idea for all Lincolnshire residents to periodically inspect their trees for signs of gypsy moth caterpillars from early May to late June.

Q: What Can I Do To Control Gypsy Moths?

A: If left unchecked, gypsy moth infestations can destroy countless amounts of valuable trees. Fortunately, there are a number of ways to reduce gypsy moth populations, and thereby limit the losses:

Keep your trees Healthy

The best way to protect your trees is to keep them healthy. Healthy trees are far more likely to be able to withstand the stress of gypsy moth defoliation. So keep your trees watered during periods of drought, avoid trunk or root injuries due to construction or other projects, have your trees pruned every 5 to 7 years, and only fertilize when needed. When gypsy moth populations explode, it is the healthy trees that will survive.

Physical Removal

At low populations, physical removal of gypsy moth caterpillars and egg masses can be a very effective way to reduce damage, and slow the insects spread.

From early May to late June caterpillars can be collected and destroyed. The best way to do this is by tying a flap of burlap around the trunks of trees. As the caterpillars climb down the tree to hide, the burlap provides a false sense of security. Then all the home owner needs to do is lift up the burlap and collect the hiding caterpillars and destroy them. It is very important that someone remember to collect the caterpillars, otherwise the burlap will serve as an excellent shelter for the pests.

From August all the way until late April (of the following year), gypsy moth numbers can be reduced through the collection and destruction of egg masses. Since destroying one egg mass can result in 1,000 fewer caterpillars in the following season, every one counts. The eggs themselves are very hard and difficult to destroy, so smashing them is not very effective. Therefore you should scrape off the egg masses into a bucket (or other container), and then burn or boil them. Remember that gypsy moth egg masses can be found virtually anywhere, so if you find one be sure to check every inch of your property for more. Cars, boats, patios, decks, outdoor furniture, plant pots, and house walls are all excellent places to find gypsy moth egg masses.

Chemical Control

There are a wide array of insecticides that have been proven effective against gypsy moth. However, due to their potential to harm non-targeted life forms, they should only be applied by certified professionals. When having pesticides applied to control gypsy moths it is important to remember that timeliness is of utmost importance. The caterpillars become resistant to many of the chemicals as they grow, so pesticides should be applied

as soon as the caterpillars begin eating.

Q: What Will the Village's Role Be in Gypsy Moth Control?

A: The Village is committed to monitoring Lincolnshire's gypsy moth population, and providing residents with the knowledge necessary to control the pest on their properties. Furthermore, each spring, the Village conducts aerial spray applications, to help reduce gypsy moth populations. The spray areas in a given year are determined, by population monitoring from the previous year, available funds, and other variables.

Check the Village Newsletter and Web Page for periodic updates and information regarding gypsy moth in Lincolnshire.