

OC0408

\$.20

Michigan State University Extension-Oakland County

Locating and Destroying Gypsy Moth Egg Masses



The Problem

Gypsy moth is an insect that feeds on a wide variety of common trees and shrubs in the landscape. The problem with them is that their population can increase dramatically within a short period of time. If left unchecked they may totally defoliate the trees in an area and be a real nuisance to people living in these wooded areas just when they want to spend some time outdoors. Repeated defoliation is stressful to the trees and after two or three years may cause some tree mortality.

Following is a simple technique that property owners can practice to help alleviate this problem. No expensive products are needed; all it takes is a little diligence and some time.

Life Cycle

Gypsy moth caterpillars hatch around the first of May in southern Michigan. When they first hatch they are very small and not very noticeable. A caterpillar's role in nature is to eat and gypsy moth caterpillars are quite good at it. In this stage of their life cycle one caterpillar can eat a square meter of foliage. The caterpillar stage is the only stage when they feed.



As the caterpillars feed they grow larger and larger by shedding their skin several times. After they have fed for about two months they go into the pupae stage for about a week where they transform into the adult egg-laying moth.

The majority of the year (about 9 months) they are in the egg stage. This gives you a long time to locate and destroy any egg masses you find on your property and in your neighborhood. By doing this you may save yourself from being inundated with feeding caterpillars just when you want to recreate out of doors.

Egg Mass Identification

The egg masses are tan or buff colored when newly laid and usually bleach lighter from the sun over winter. By spring they may appear white. They have a felt-like texture. This is hair from the female moth's abdomen which makes them very weather resistant. They are irregular in shape, being wider at one end. Their size ranges from $\frac{1}{2}$ " x $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 2" x $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Each egg mass contains from 50 to 1500 individual eggs. Old egg masses can stay on the trees for more than one year, so it is important to be able to tell



the difference. Eggs that will hatch in the spring will be firm to the touch. Old ones will feel soft and spongy.

Location

The female moth will lay her eggs on any convenient surface. Since she cannot fly it is usually close to the pupal case. Look at the undersides of the oak and cherry trees. Also look along the foundation, around window frames, under the eaves, along any steps, and under the deck. Pay particular attention to any evergreens, (i.e. Blue spruce, arborvitae, white pines, or any other evergreen) in the yard. Spread the branches apart and look along the trunk and undersides of the branches. Look at the base of all trees and the ground cover growing at the base of the tree. Inspect anything that is outdoors all year: the shed, tree house, playhouse, picnic table, flower planters, bird feeders, bird houses, behind any signs attached to your trees, any fencing in the yard (make sure to check undersides or in the holes of the posts) the firewood you buy, your boat trailer or anything you have brought home from up north. In other words, anything living or not is fair game for the moth to lay her eggs on so check everything.



Please use common sense and caution. Even though you may see egg masses high up in the trees you will really only be able to deal with the egg masses that are within six feet of the ground. Do not do anything that may cause you

harm, such as climbing on the roof or stepping on that top ladder rung.

Destroying the Egg Masses

Once you have located egg masses on your property, it is time to take action. Remember that you have all winter to do this. (If your municipality participates in the county suppression program you will want to wait until February to start this.) Many people will wait until the weather breaks in spring. This is actually preferable as it gives egg parasites time to destroy some of the eggs. Just make sure you get to them before they start to hatch around the end of April/ beginning of May. You will need:

A pair of gloves (a small portion of people may get a rash from the egg masses)

A paper bag or a tin can

An old toothbrush or putty knife

The process of destroying egg masses is quite simple. Scrape the masses into the bag or tin can being careful not to injure the tree bark. Once you have removed all you can find or reach, either burn the paper bag or fill the can with soapy water and let the egg masses soak for a couple of days.

▶ Do not scrape the eggs onto the ground as they are very hardy and will most likely still hatch.

▶ Do not take a blow torch to your trees or house. Many a tree has been mortally wounded and house fires have been started by this practice.

▶ Pesticides will not kill the egg masses.

Scraping and destroying any egg masses you can reach on your property is the single best way you can help yourself and your neighborhood deal with a gypsy moth infestation in your area. Make it a family project.

If you do find evidence of the gypsy moth on your property, please call your municipal offices and let them know. Additional gypsy moth reference material is available at MSU Extension –Oakland County, 248/858-0880.

Prepared by: Carol Lenchek, Oakland County Gypsy Moth Suppression Program Coordinator

Would you like additional information?

Additional information is available on-line. Please see [MSU Extension-Oakland County's publications](#) as well as the [MSU Extension Bookstore](#) on campus.

Please contact our office (248/858-0880) for assistance.