

CONTROL THE CATERPILLARS

Most homeowners don't realize that they have a gypsy moth infestation until they begin to see caterpillars or the damage they cause. There are several proven ways to reduce the number of caterpillars and protect your landscape plants.

Mechanical Control

Mechanical gypsy moth controls do not involve the use of insecticides to kill caterpillars. The two most widely used mechanical devices are burlap skirts and barrier bands. Burlap skirts are actually traps designed to provide sheltered resting sites for caterpillars. Because you can install them at chest level, the resting caterpillars are easy to collect and destroy with your spoon and detergent solution. Avoid slicing or stabbing the caterpillars with a sharp instrument, since you may puncture and damage tender tree bark. The burlap skirt is simply a 12-18 inch wide band of burlap cut a little longer than the distance around the tree. Wrap the band around the tree, overlapping the ends, and tie securely in the middle with baler twine or nylon cord. Fold the top half of the band down over the bottom half to form a loose skirt. Band all trees favored by the gypsy moth and check every day or two by lifting the skirt to collect hiding caterpillars.

Gypsy moth barrier bands are slippery or sticky tapes wrapped around trees and shrubs to stop caterpillars from crawling up to the leaves. Available in many styles, colors, and sizes, tests have shown the aluminum foil-type sticky tapes to be most effective.

Insecticidal Control

When gypsy moth infestations are severe or a large forested area must be maintained, insecticide spraying may be the best alternative. Trees and shrubs 50 feet or less in height may be sprayed with a backpack mistblower or high pressure garden sprayer. For taller trees, you may need to employ a licensed, commercial pesticide applicator to treat with heavier ground equipment or aircraft.

There are several chemical and biological insecticides registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for gypsy moth control in Pennsylvania. Of the biological sprays, formulations of the bacterial disease *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) are most widely used. Contact your local garden supply dealer for any insecticides that are available. Follow label instructions exactly.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and participating counties, conducts an annual gypsy moth spray program for qualifying applicants who live in forested residential communities. Contact your county gypsy moth coordinator at the Pike County Conservation District for more information or to see if Pike County will be participating in the program.



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GYPSY MOTH CONTROL OPTIONS FOR THE HOMEOWNER



Information made available by the:
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Environmental Resources
Office of Resources Management
Bureau of Forestry
Division of Forest Pest Management

PREVENTION CAN BE THE BEST CURE

Diversify your Landscape

The gypsy moth feeds on more than 300 kinds of trees and shrubs in Pennsylvania. Some, such as the oaks, are highly favored and must be present for the young caterpillars to survive and allow the infestation to grow to a damaging level. A few trees such as tulip poplar, dogwood, and white ash are immune to severe attacks. However, most trees and shrubs falls somewhere in between and may be nibbled on or completely defoliated depending on the number and size of caterpillars present. The accompanying chart lists some of the common landscape plants that the gypsy moth generally dislikes.

Landscape Plants not Favored by Gypsy Moth			
Arborvitae	Gooseberry	Lilac	Privet
Ash	Grape	Locust	Raspberry
Azalea	Hackberry	Striped Maple	Redbud
Blackberry	Hibiscus	Mountain Laurel	Rhododendron
Boxwood	Holly	Mulberry	Spicebush
Catalpa	Honeylocust	Myrtle	Sycamore
Cedars	Honeysuckle	Persimmon	Tulip Poplar
Dogwood	Horsechestnut	Peach	Viburnum
Ferns	Ivy	Periwinkle	Yew
Gingko	Juniper		

The more of these and other unfavored plants on your property, the better your chances are of avoiding a gypsy moth buildup and the associated defoliation and nuisance problems.

Maintain your Plants

Sick or stressed trees are easy prey for gypsy moth caterpillars. Healthy, vigorous plants tend to resist attack and have a better chance of surviving a severe infestation of hungry insects.

Water, fertilizer, and pruning are the essential elements of good tree maintenance. Most trees in Pennsylvania

need at least one inch of water per week during the growing season. This is especially important during periods of drought. Trees should be fed with a balanced fertilizer in early spring to ensure an adequate supply of nutrients for vigorous growth. A granular fertilizer should be broadcast evenly right out past the reach of the farthest branch tips of established plants.

Fertilizing time in late March or early April is also a good time to prune trees and many non-flowering shrubs. Flowering plants should be pruned only after flowering is complete. Prune to shape the plants and to remove any broken, dead, or diseased branches.



Female laying eggs on porch

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The gypsy moth utilizes many natural resting sites, including the undersides of living and dead limbs, loose and deeply fissured bark, and rocks and fallen trees. For the most part, it is impossible to eliminate a significant number of these natural sites. However, the gypsy moth also utilizes any available artificial resting site, and it is here that the homeowner can make an impact.

Anything that a caterpillar can crawl under that is placed on or near a favored gypsy moth food plant can become a resting site. Some common backyard gypsy moth

“hotspots” are tree houses, trespass signs, stacked fuelwood, junk piles, picnic tables, and outbuildings. Eliminating these preferred hiding spots can help slow gypsy moth buildups. Even beneficial items such as bird boxes and feeders are excellent resting sites. Examine and remove any resting caterpillars from them frequently.

Destroy Female Moths and Egg Masses

Each female moth or egg mass that you destroy eliminates an average of 500 caterpillars from next year’s population. Female moths are flightless and crawl from their pupation sites to mate and lay eggs. Look for the white females and buff-colored, nickel-sized egg masses beginning in July.

Carry a spoon and a jar half full of strong detergent solution as you search the tree trunks, loose bark, and other dry sheltered sites. Scrape moths and egg masses into the solution and let it stand a day or two before discarding. Do not merely scrape them onto the ground, as this will not kill the eggs and the winter snows may actually protect the eggs from natural enemies.

Do not use home remedies to paint or spray egg masses, especially grease, oil, tar, or creosote. These and many other household products can soak through tree bark and kill the living tissue beneath.

When gypsy moth populations become heavy, killing female moths and egg masses may be of little value, since many eggs will be deposited high in the trees and out of reach.



IF THAT FAILS-