

Spongy Moth

TREE DOCTOR TIPS

Spongy Moth (*Lymantria dispar*) (formerly Gypsy Moth)

DESCRIPTION:

Spongy moths are insects that can cause extreme defoliation to trees when in their caterpillar stage.

HOSTS:

Preferred tree species include alder, aspen, basswood, birch, hawthorn, oaks and willow. Crabapples are also highly favored. Least preferred tree species include American holly, ash, black locust, flowering dogwood, sycamore and tulip.

BIOLOGY AND SYMPTOMS:

The spongy moth is one of the most destructive insects in North America. Most of the destruction occurs in the Northeast, but it's spreading to southern and central states, as well as the Great Lakes states.

Young caterpillars spin down on silken threads from treetops and move through wind currents. Mature spongy moth caterpillars are identified by five pairs of blue spots followed by six pairs of red spots on their backs. After the caterpillars have pupated, adult spongy moths emerge in early to mid summer.

These insects are ravenous feeders. For example, a single caterpillar can eat its way through 10 square feet of foliage during its development. Trees that are infested with spongy moth caterpillars become weak and more susceptible to other problems. Within one year, complete defoliation can kill conifers and hardwoods.

A female moth can lay up to 1000 eggs. Egg sacs can be found on trees, rocks, walls, firewood, sides of houses and underneath vehicles.

MANAGEMENT:

To control spongy moths, one or even two foliar treatments may be necessary because of the caterpillar's long emergence period. Ideal timing is about three weeks after first egg hatch. Three weeks gives enough time for all eggs to hatch and caterpillars to finish dispersing in the wind, but before damage occurs. Bt, a bacterial pathogen, is effective on caterpillars. Trunk injections with systemic insecticides may also be an option. Trees recovering from spongy moth damage should also be fertilized to help the healing process.



A



B



C



D

FIGURE A. SPONGY MOTH CATERPILLAR

FIGURE B. SPONGY MOTH EGG MASS

FIGURE C. MALE SPONGY MOTH

FIGURE D. FEMALE SPONGY MOTHS LAYING EGGS

*The scientists at **The Davey Institute** laboratory and research facility support our arborists and technicians in diagnosing and prescribing based on the latest arboricultural science. For specific treatment and application details, your arborist may consult **The Davey Institute's Plant Health Care Book**.*

