

Just the Facts...

The European Gypsy moth has spread throughout northeastern United States after being accidentally released in Massachusetts in 1869. While there are three races of gypsy moths, the European, Asian and Japanese, this Fact Sheet will focus on the most prevalent and destructive race in North America, the European Gypsy Moth.

What are gypsy moths?

Gypsy moths (*Lymantria dispar*), are insects that belong to the Order Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths). These insects have four life stages; egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa and adult (moth). The larger white female moths lay up to 1,000 eggs or more in a tan colored, soft, fuzzy, oval-shaped mass, about 1 inch long by ½ an inch wide.



Daniel Herms, The Ohio State University, Bugwood.org

The photo above includes the white female (left), the brown colored male (right) and the tan egg mass (bottom).

The caterpillars have a yellowish head capsule and a hairy charcoal grey body with 4 to 5 pairs of blue dots and 5 to 6 pairs of red dots along their backs. As the larvae mature the dots on their back may become darker in color and the body may grow up to 2 ½ inches in length.

The fine hairs that cover gypsy moth eggs, caterpillar and pupae can cause skin irritation and rashes. The female gypsy moths are white in color with dark zigzag markings on their wings and have a wingspan of up to 3 inches. Although the females have wings, they are flightless. Male gypsy moths are smaller, brownish in color and have a wingspan of about 1 ½ inches.



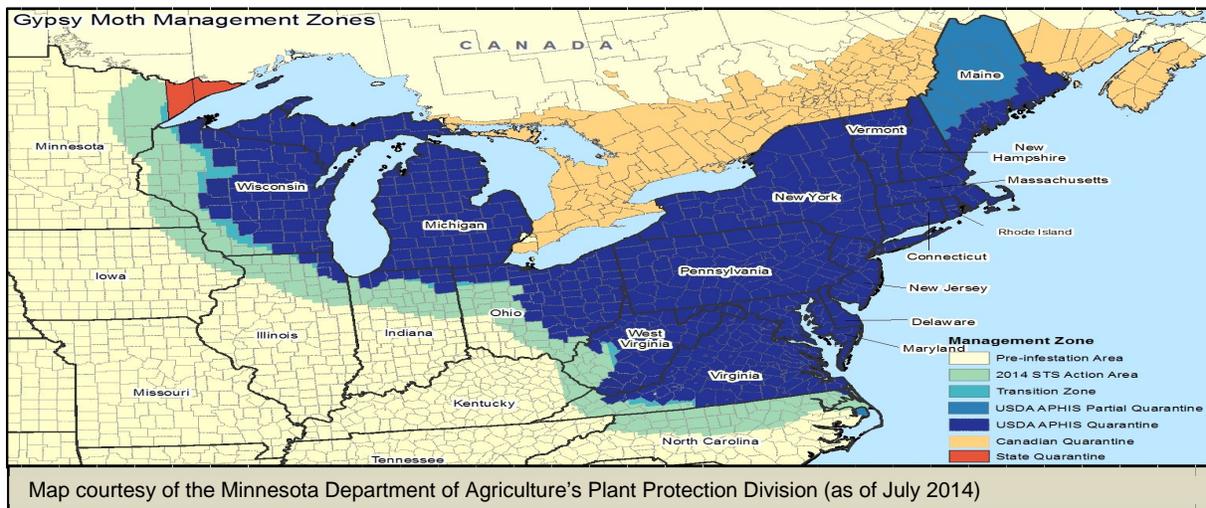
Photo of a gypsy moth caterpillar.

Where can I find gypsy moths?

In the USA, gypsy moths are mainly found in the northeastern part of the country (as represented in the dark blue below) but they continue to spread further away from Massachusetts, the site of their accidental release in 1869.

What do gypsy moth caterpillars eat?

The caterpillars feed on the leaves of trees and shrubs and have a particular preference for oak trees. Repeated defoliation of trees, where all of the leaves are eaten, over two consecutive years can stress the plant and may lead to their death.



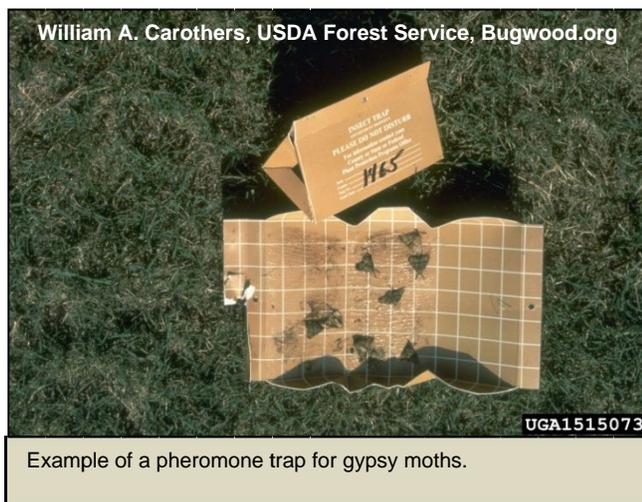
How can I manage gypsy moth populations around my yard?

- Small, isolated populations of gypsy moths can be managed by non-chemical control measures such as commercial double-sided sticky tape, or wrapping a piece of burlap cloth around the trunk. The double stick tape will prevent the daily migration of the caterpillars. Burlap cloths can also be tied around the tree trunk to provide shelter for the caterpillars as they migrate up and down the tree. The burlap cloths can then be removed daily to kill the caterpillars.
- You can also destroy the egg masses. Look for the tan colored masses on or under tree limbs and trunks, wood piles, buildings, vehicles, trailers, recreational equipment and any other sheltered locations outdoors. You can use a tool like a paint scraper to remove them. Make sure the masses are crushed, simply picking the egg masses off and dropping them on the ground will not kill them. Wear gloves when handling the egg masses because they are covered with hairs which may cause an allergic reaction.
- Healthy plants have a better chance of survival after being defoliated, so fertilizing, watering and mulching trees and shrubs that have been fed upon by gypsy moths may help with the plants' recovery.
- Commercially available attractants are also available for purchase like the one seen on the left. These attractants include bait that mimics the chemicals or "pheromones" released by the female moths. The flightless females release pheromones to attract male moths to fertilize the female's eggs. These traps confuse the males and lure them into a trap from which they cannot escape. By reducing the population of male gypsy moths, less viable eggs should be available for the following year.



How can I keep gypsy moths from spreading?

Gypsy moths were named for their ability to "hitchhike" to new locations on objects. Gypsy moths are introduced to new areas when equipment, cargo, household goods and privately owned vehicles are infested with attached egg cases or pupae and then are transported to new areas. For the military it is important to inspect equipment or any household goods during a permanent/temporary change of duty station (PCS/TDY) that involves moving from an area of the country with gypsy moths, (especially the northeast) to areas without gypsy moths.



What can I do if I have a heavy infestation of gypsy moths?

You can contact your installation's pest control office or your local state extension agent for more information. During years of heavy outbreaks, gypsy moth caterpillars can cause widespread damage and their populations cannot be managed at the individual level.