



Species Brief 5.3

What Is in Your Firewood?

Gypsy Moth



Pest and Target Species

Gypsy moth caterpillars, *Lymantria dispar* (Lepidoptera: Lymantriidae), can feed on more than 300 species of trees and shrubs, including willow, poplar, oak, cottonwood, cedar, birch, aspen, and fruit trees.

Range

Gypsy moth is native to Europe but has been established for over a century in the northeastern United States and has been expanding its range south and westward. In the southern region, gypsy moth is established in much of Virginia and two counties in North Carolina. It has been detected in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Texas, and Florida but has not become established in those states.

Identification and Symptoms

Gypsy moth caterpillars are distinguishable from those of other species by the abundant

hairs and the five pairs of blue spots and six pairs of red spots that run down their backs (Figure 1). Adult male gypsy moths are brown with a darker brown pattern on their wings; they have a wingspan of one-and-a-half inches. Adult females are slightly larger, with a wingspan of two inches; they are white in color with dark “saw-toothed” patterns on their wings (Figure 2). Females are unable to fly. The unique appearance of the gypsy moth egg mass is a key characteristic used to identify the species (Figure 3). Gypsy moth caterpillars are aggressive feeders, capable of defoliating an entire tree canopy in just a few days (Figure 4). Repeated defoliation can lead to tree mortality in one to two years.

Control Options

The best method of controlling the gypsy moth is to prevent its introduction. Since the egg masses are small and difficult to detect, people can easily transport them unintentionally to



Photo by: John H. Ghent, US Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Figure 1: A gypsy moth caterpillar.



Photo by: John H. Ghent, US Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Figure 2: Male (darker, smaller) and female (lighter, larger) gypsy moths.

Photo by: John H. Ghent, US Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Figure 3: Female gypsy moths over egg masses.

new areas. It is recommended that infested wood debris and firewood not be moved long distances. If traveling for recreational activities, it is recommended that people leave firewood at home and instead buy local firewood at the destination. If departing from a location with a gypsy moth population, it is recommended that cars, trailers, boats and camping equipment be inspected for gypsy moth egg masses and that the masses are removed before traveling.

The massive tree defoliation by caterpillars attracts most attention to this life stage of the gypsy moth. The most common approach to control is aerial application of biologically derived pesticides to suppress outbreaks of gypsy moth populations.

When a reproducing gypsy moth population is found, a quarantine is put into place to limit the spread of the pest through human activities. The quarantine prohibits the transport of firewood out of quarantined areas into unaffected areas.

Photo by: Tim Tigner, Virginia Dept. of Forestry, Bugwood.org



Figure 4: Overstory oak mortality as a result of gypsy moth defoliation.

Suggested Resources

Animals: Species Profiles—Gypsy Moth.
www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/animals/eurogypsymoth.shtml

Gypsy Moth in North America.
www.fs.fed.us/ne/morgantown/4557/gmoth/

Hungry Pests: Leave Hungry Pests Behind.
www.hungrypests.com/the-threat/european-gypsy-moth.php

Plant Health—Gypsy Moth.
www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/gypsy_moth/index.shtml



http://ncforestservice.gov/forest_health/monitoring_invasives.htm