



Gypsy Moth

Gypsy Moths are a very serious threat to trees and they are spreading into Illinois from the north and east. Oaks are a favorite food of gypsy moths when they are in their larval stage, but they also dine on the leaves of apple, alder, basswood, hawthorn, some poplars and willow. Less desirable but still palatable to the larvae are the elm, black gum, hickory, maple and sassafras. If large populations are present, a last resort for the larvae are beech, hemlock, white cedar, pine and spruce.

Symptoms

Look for gypsy moth caterpillars on the leaves of trees and shrubs from early May to the end of June. At maturity, these hairy caterpillars are up to 2 1/2 inches long with 5 pairs of blue spots on one end and six pairs of red spots along the other end. From August until trees leaf out in the spring, look for buff colored egg masses about 1 1/2 inches long by 3/4 inch wide. Look for egg masses on tree trunks, under loose bark, in wood piles, on outdoor furniture or on the undersides of cars and other vehicles.

Cause / Conditions

Accidental human movement of caterpillars and eggs during vacations, business trips, and household moves probably accounts for infiltration of the moth to our area. Caterpillars climb to the tops of trees, spin out strands of silk, suspend themselves on the strands and are blown to new feeding sites. They can be blown for several hundred yards or several miles depending on the openness of the area. Only the males fly, females lay eggs, but do not fly. As caterpillars become larger they begin a daily trek from the canopy of the tree to escape direct sunlight and predators. Common daytime hiding places include leaf litter and bark crevices, any place that provides protection. Toward evening caterpillars come out of hiding and migrate up the tree to feed on the leaves.

Control / Cure

Successful eradication in Illinois probably depends on some help from nature. Gypsy moth eggs are killed at temperatures of -20 degrees and lower, three consecutive days at those temperatures will kill almost all of the overwintering eggs. Egg masses can be physically removed and dropped into a bucket of hot water and bleach or ammonia. Cloth banding trees to give caterpillars a place to hide during the day allows for daily removal. Directions for proper cloth banding of trees is readily available by giving us a call. Bt (Bacillus thuringensis, Kurstaki) a "Biological Insecticide", is effective against the caterpillar stage. Some pesticides and insecticides are effective against the caterpillars, however, use of certain chemicals may be restricted.



Look for egg masses on the underside of limbs & on trunks



Female Gypsy Moth laying eggs



Fully grown Gypsy Moth Larvae