

Gypsy Moth Management – SEARCH AND DESTROY!

This summer, many parts of Eastern Connecticut were so besieged with gypsy moth caterpillars that the trees looked like early spring and not July. Thirty-four years ago, there was a similar deforestation of the trees. Fortunately, nature provided a cure. A natural fungus killed most of the caterpillars that year. Unfortunately, the fungus requires wet conditions which we did not have this year. That means that next year promises to be another banner year for the gypsy moth caterpillars.

After the destructive caterpillar stage, sometime around the beginning of August, the moths fly around for about a week looking for mates and laying eggs. The female moths do not fly and they will lay their eggs on trees, furniture, siding of a house, under rocks and anywhere that they can. These egg masses will be dormant until the spring. Between now and early spring is the time to do a search and destroy.



The egg masses are a tan color, often teardrop shaped about 1-2 inches long. Each egg mass can contain between 500 to 1,000 eggs. That means that each egg mass destroyed could mean 1,000 less caterpillars.

There are a couple of methods to destroy the egg masses. One is to scrape the eggs with a blunt knife such as a putty knife, into a container of soapy water and let it sit for a few days. Just scraping the egg masses onto the ground does not kill the eggs and attempting to step on them will not kill them all. Another method is to use a spray oil, such as Golden Pest Spray Oil by Stoller. Most insecticides will not kill the eggs so make sure that the oil has been specifically labeled for killing gypsy moth egg cases. If using the oil, follow the directions on the product and make sure that the egg cases are saturated.

Once the eggs have hatched, there are several options for control. During the very early stages of the caterpillar growth, wrap duct tape around the trunk of the tree at least two inches wide. Cover the tape with Vaseline or a commercial product such as Tanglefoot. This traps the caterpillars and prevents them from getting up the tree to eat. As the caterpillars get larger, use a folded burlap wrap to trap them from moving up and down the tree. The burlap trap should be checked daily and the caterpillars picked off by hand. The burlap can be treated with insecticide so that they don't need to be hand-picked. Biological controls such as Bt or chemical controls such as Spinosad are most effective when done in the early stages before the caterpillars are full size.