

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

At *Mass Hort, Wellesley*: mghelpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At *Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston*: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our website for Help Line hours: <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



WINTER AND GYPSY MOTHS

The **Winter Moth** appears as a white adult moth in November and December and in spring as a tiny green caterpillar with white stripes along both sides of the body. It attacks primarily oaks, maples, ash, white elm, crabapples, apples, and blueberries, and has no known predator in Massachusetts. In summer, female winter moths lay their eggs under the bark and in the crevices of trees. In spring, when the temperature averages around 55 degrees, the eggs hatch. Once hatched, the larvae start working their way into tree buds and leaves to feed. By mid-June the caterpillars go to the soil to pupate and emerge as moths in November and December.

The **Gypsy Moth** mature caterpillar (2-2.5" in length) has five pairs of blue-gray warts followed by six rows of red warts running the length of its body. The larva emerges in May from eggs deposited on tree trunks and it starts to feed mainly on the leaves of oak, birch and apple. Long silken web threads are woven which allow it to travel to other trees and the ground. During the day it follows the "thread" down to a dark, dry, sheltered place and at night follows the thread back to the tree's crown to feed. In July, the caterpillar pupates in sheltered locations and emerges as an adult moth in about two weeks. After mating, the females deposit egg masses on a tree trunk to emerge in the spring as young larvae. After a 35-year absence, gypsy moths have made a comeback in central and southeastern Massachusetts because the fungus that was introduced to keep them manageable has not been able to grow because of drought conditions.

The Winter and Gypsy moths are invasive insects, and can completely defoliate a heavily infested tree. Healthy trees are capable of re-foliating, but the tree is severely stressed. Extra watering during the season will help the tree with the stress of defoliation and re-foliation.

Controls

Winter Moths. Horticultural oil sprays applied to tree trunks and branches suffocate the egg clusters. Timing is important. Although it may help with the overwintering eggs, the ones hidden under tree crevices or lichen will not be affected by the oil.

Gypsy Moths. There are no reliable organic remedies. Tree banding – the use of burlap or plastic strips with a sticky substance creating a barrier that entraps the caterpillar – has been ineffective. Drawbacks are that the bands fill up and lose their effectiveness, some insects are able to pass under the bands, and female moths will lay their eggs below the bands.

If the infestation of either moth is heavy, contact a reputable pest management firm or arborist for advice. If spraying of pesticides is recommended as a last resort, B.t. Kurstaki, a bacterial pesticide, has proven effective. But beware, it may also kill many of our native butterflies and moths. Also, it must be sprayed when the caterpillar is still small as it must be ingested. Do not use chemical pesticides, or you will kill every insect – good and bad – that ingests it.

For more information, visit <https://ag.usmass.edu> and www.massaudubon.org

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics.

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