

Spongy Moth



What Do We Know?

The Spongy Moth, *Lymantria dispar dispar*, (formerly known as the gypsy moth) is an insect pest of the forest. Spongy Moth caterpillars feed on the leaf tissue of a variety of hardwood and conifer species. Outbreaks can occur and have the potential for widespread defoliation in forest stands where susceptible species such as oaks are dominant. While most affected trees will regrow their leaves, the defoliation causes trees stress and leaving them in a weakened state. This sometimes opens the door for secondary pests or severe weather to cause additional damage and possibly mortality. Forest stands which endure consecutive years of defoliation are more likely to experience higher mortality rates.

The Spongy moth was originally brought to the US by an amateur entomologist who reared them at his home in Massachusetts. They escaped into the surrounding areas in the late 1860s and the population was left unchecked until the 1890s. Since then, they have been spreading south and west and are currently seen from Maine south to Virginia and west to Wisconsin. They were known to be in Delaware in the early 1980s. Because the female is flightless, the spread of the Spongy moth is relatively slow. But the egg masses get transported found on firewood, human made products such as furniture and even vehicles. Caterpillars may move around locally (usually less than a mile) by ballooning, which is when they catch onto wind by suspending themselves from branches using silk strands.

The Spongy moth females lay between 100 and 1000 eggs in masses that are cream colored and may seem hairy. These masses are laid in mid to late summer and overwinter until the caterpillars hatch in the spring. The caterpillars appear dark and hairy and as they grow, red and blue dots become apparent on their upper surface. Generally, there will be 5 pairs of raised blue dots and 6 pairs of raised red dots. They can be distinguished from other caterpillars like the Eastern tent caterpillar because defoliation occurs earlier, and they do not congregate in webs or tents. The pupae are dark brown and are secured to structures by silk. Adults emerge in early June through the fall. Delaware noticed an uptick in Spongy moth activity with about 825 acres of defoliation occurring in 2022 compared to only 12 acres in 2021. More details can be found in US Forest Service [Spongy Moth FID Leaflet](#).

www.delawareinvasives.net
Facebook: [DEInvasiveSC](#)

National Invasive Species Awareness Week - 2023

Quick Facts

- Females are white with black markings and flightless
- Males are a mottled brown with black wing markings and feathery antennae
- They prefer White oaks, but also target apples, willows and hawthorns
- Tulip poplars, black cherries, and American sycamores are immune
- Contact the DE Forest Service for technical assistance (302) 698-4553

