

Gypsy Moth – An Unwelcome Visitor

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Submitted June 20, 2006

Gypsy Moths have been on North America for well over a century and a half. The Gypsy Moth is just one of the mistakes made by entrepreneurs in 1869 who imported species of trees and insects to enter the world economy of silk production. The result has been long-range threat to our timber species.

So you think the Gypsy Moth sounds mysterious, even romantic? Think again. This little insect is pesky and not welcome visitor. It seems that at least half of Ohio's counties have as serious infestation and are under a Federal and State quarantine. Wood County is one of the counties under this quarantine. These place restrictions on the movement of firewood, trimmings, and especially pieces of bark that could contain egg infestations. Such materials are to remain on the property.

The oak and hickory families are the favorite hosts of the Gypsy Moths. Many other species, including sycamore, walnut, tulip poplar, ash, and locust seem to be immune. Oaks are desirable landscaping trees, plus several species, of the family are significant commodities in the lumber business. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, with county agents, State Department of Natural Resources, and extension specialists, has made a concerted effort, to control and eventually eradicate the Gypsy Moth. Methods include mass trapping, insecticides and biological controls. Recently, a new weapon emerged to fight this pest. A fungus, *Entomophaga* is proving to be deadly against the caterpillars.

Therefore, the critical time to be observant begins in May when the vulnerable species are leafing out. This is when the larva emerges and begins to eat the leaves at a rate of a square foot of foliage in 24 hours. These caterpillars average at least 2 inches long. While the caterpillars "balloon" from silken threads, they do not spin webs or tents. After a several week feast the caterpillars enter the pupa stage during the summer. By late summer, the brown and white adult moths will be laying their eggs, which will hatch the following May and further denude the tree.

What can we do? This May and June, make it a point to look at your trees, particularly the oaks. Realize, however, that many other trees can be vulnerable. Vigilance is the first line of defense. If you see the larva (caterpillars), call the Ohio Department of Agriculture or the Ohio Division of Natural Resources Urban Forester for advice. The local Ohio State Extension office is also a good contact.

There are several good web sites on identification and control. In any event, remember that Bowling Green is a Tree City USA, and populated with people who want to protect resources.