

Penn State prof advises gypsy moth control

UNIVERSITY PARK — Nestled contentedly amidst succulent new green foliage, billions of fuzzy black caterpillars now are feasting on and starting to defoliate trees in most of the state.

These gypsy moth larvae will begin their permanent descent in June — an event that will alarm Pennsylvanians confronted by denuded or partially bare trees, and caterpillars everywhere underfoot.

Seeking to protect trees and to destroy the invaders, many people then will spray with insecticide or hire someone to do so. Some will drape burlap around tree trunks to capture and later kill

the insects.

"By that time such strategies are in vain and you're wasting time and money," advises Stanley G. Gesell, a Penn State professor of Entomology Extension.

"When the caterpillars come down to lay gypsy moth eggs, the tree damage has been done. If you're aiming to destroy the insects by spraying when they're on the ground, you'll cause a worse nuisance — an enormous stench of decaying caterpillars.

"At that juncture you'd best leave them alone," he advises. "They'll disappear by July 1."

The only way to prevent significant tree damage, and

sometimes tree death, he continues, is to spray — and only in mid-to-late May, after the eggs laid the previous summer have hatched and before the larvae have eaten too much.

"Unless individuals and communities to extensive spraying soon," he emphasizes, "we can expect tremendous defoliation, an unpredictable amount of tree mortality and large numbers of unhappy people."

Short of spraying now, he adds, the only positive strategy is to drape large pieces of burlap around tree trunks, for ten days to two weeks beginning the last week in May.

"During that period," explains Gesell, "large numbers of the larvae come down from high tree branches in the morning to avoid the growing heat. While some of these caterpillars seek shelter in loose tree bark, many can be captured in the burlap, which they'll also use to hide in before their afternoon pilgrimage back up the tree. Larvae thus captured can be mashed and disposed of.

"Unfortunately, many people misunderstand that where the trees are concerned, this is only a palliative. It prevents total

defoliation, leaving the trees green. It doesn't protect trees from the serious damage which, if sustained for two or three consecutive years, can kill the tree."

While gypsy moth larvae will eat the leaves of many types of forest, fruit and shade trees, they have their preferences, he continues. They favor oaks, but will munch on apple, birch, hazelnut, linden, beech, red cedar, hemlock, willow, pine and spruce. They don't like ash, balsam, fir, blackberry, dogwood, grape, holly, mulberry, sycamore and walnut.

This spring, says Gesell, Pennsylvania is experiencing its biggest, most devastating gypsy moth invasion. Areas which suffered significant infestation last year have had a far greater outbreak — and probably will sustain still more tree damage.

The long-established pattern is a two- or three-year massive outbreak followed by a collapse.

Part of a northeastern U.S. phenomenon, he explains, the state's gypsy moth problem generally has been moving northeast to southwest along the mountain ridges. The "front" this

year is near Phillipsburg, in Clearfield County.

Major parts of Centre, Huntingdon and Blair counties also are being hard hit. Nearby Cambria, Bedford, Fulton and Franklin counties are suffering too.

And significantly this year the gypsy moth has made its first major invasion of Philadelphia and southeastern Pennsylvania. It also again will do extensive damage in the Poconos, as well as in the northcentral/northeastern counties of Tioga, Bradford, Susquehanna and Wyoming.



Of the 41 million square miles of land in the temperate zone, only five million are considered good farm land.

Berks dairyman

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Duncan praises a recent change in the parlor, a De Laval DV 300 milking unit with automatic take-off.

"The pulsation starts off slow, and, as the milk flow gets stronger, it goes to 70 pulses per minute. When the cow is milked out, the button goes down and the claws come off," he explains.

"It's the fastest way to get the milk out of a cow," he adds, noting his mastitis rate has come down since he changed from a non-automatic unit.

Duncan attributes his reduced mastitis count to other factors: the low-line with its 3-inch stainless steel pipe and 3-inch vacuum line, dry udders before the milker is put on the cow, and treating teats with a dip.

"The low-line produces a stable vacuum — we milk at 15 pounds now instead of the old 13 pounds where we had trouble with milkers coming off.

"The terry towels are the secret for mastitis control though. When the cow's dry before the milker is put on, there's no chance for dirt and manure to work its way down into the claw and up into the teat. And terry towels are cheaper, reusable, and better than paper towels. We keep enough towels on hand for each cow to supply two days of two-times-a-day milking," Duncan professes.

The DHIA rolling average of the

Duncan herd is 16,400 pounds milk with 642 pounds fat. And, like most Berks County farms, Duncan ships his milk as an independent to a local dairy.

He explains Berks County is not in the Federal Order and is regulated by the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board.

"We get 28 cents below the Federal Order for our milk," he says, "but we come out above because of higher utilization.

Clarifying his position as a Berks dairy farmer and as the president of the Keystone Milk Marketing Association, Duncan states, "I'm not saying the Federal Order isn't necessary — there are places where it's needed. But it shouldn't be forced on farmers who don't need it, like here where our milk supplies a local market and our promotion dollars are spent."

Duncan also serves as president of the Berks Dairy Farmers Association and as chairman of his township's planning commission. He is a member of the county's Pennsylvania Farmers' Association, Bernville Grange, and Chamber of Commerce Ag Committee.

"Politics is a necessary evil. As farmers, we have to watch out for ourselves. No one else is going to protect us, preserve our farmland or prices. Farmers are an endangered species vitally important to our country," Duncan concludes.

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