

Don't confuse Gypsy Moth with other pests

NEWARK, Del. — Delaware residents are on the lookout for gypsy moths in their yards. Control of this harmful pest will be easier if gypsy moths are not confused with two other well-known insects — the eastern tent caterpillar and the forest tent caterpillar.

The appearance and habits of the three leaf-eaters are quite different, says Mark Graustein, extension entomologist at the University of Delaware. He suggests homeowners first learn how to identify the egg masses.

The gypsy moth egg mass is buff colored and velvety, resembling a small piece of chamois. Look for it on trees, lawn furniture, fence posts and other objects. Also check recreational vehicles, since this pest often spreads by hitchhiking.

The eastern tent caterpillar's egg mass looks like a dark brown varnished belt or collar encircling a twig or branch. That of the forest tent caterpillar is similar.

All three types of egg masses can be destroyed with an aerosol spray designed for the purpose, Graustein says. He prefers this approach to painting the egg masses with a 50-50 mixture of creosote and kerosene. The creosote mixture is toxic to humans, he points out, and should be handled with extreme care only while wearing nonporous gloves. The commercial spray is safer and

just as effective. Neither approach, however, can control a serious infestation.

Tent caterpillar eggs hatch several weeks earlier than those of the gypsy moth. Larvae of the eastern tent caterpillar begin to appear in Delaware around the first week of April when tree buds start to show green. Those of the forest tent caterpillar appear about a week later. Gypsy moth larvae emerge toward the end of April.

Larval stages of the three insects are easy to distinguish if you know what to look for, says Graustein. Eastern tent caterpillars spin silky threads forming grey, weblike nests in the crotches of tree limbs and branches. Larvae live in these nests, coming out several times a day to feed. They prefer the foliage of wild cherry and apple trees.

Contrary to its name, the forest tent caterpillar does not make a tent. It prefers to feed on aspen, gum and oak foliage.

Mature tent caterpillars are nearly 2 inches long, with sparse hair, and white and blue stripes along the sides of the black body. The eastern tent caterpillar has a white stripe down the middle of its back, while the forest tent caterpillar has keyhole-shaped white spots down its back.

The gypsy moth larva is much hairier. It, too, grows to about 2 inches long, but the most distinc-

tive markings on this dark grey worm are the warts located on top of each body segment except the first. Counting back from the head, the first five pairs of these warts are blue. The last six pairs are red.

When first hatched, gypsy moth caterpillars hang from their hatching site by a thin thread, and are carried elsewhere to feed by the wind. In a good breeze they may travel a half-mile or more. Favorite food of the gypsy moth is the foliage of oak and birch trees.

The mature gypsy moth caterpillar pupates under loose bark, groundcovers, houses, fence posts and other objects. The pupa is dark brown and shaped like an olive seed. Adult moths emerge after about three weeks, with peak emergence usually occurring in mid-July. Female moths have a wing span of about 2 inches, but are heavy-bodied and can't fly.

Graustein says. However, the smaller males are strong daytime fliers.

Both eastern and forest tent caterpillars pupate inside sulfur yellow or creamy white cocoons. Since their moths are strictly night fliers, they are seldom seen.

The best time to control all these pests is in the early larval stage.

Information on recommended controls for the gypsy moth, eastern tent caterpillar and forest tent caterpillar is available by writing: Mail Room, Townsend Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19717-1303. Or contact the county extension office in Newark (451-2506), Dover (736-1448), or Georgetown (856-5250).

Natural pest controls

NEWARK, Del. — Some people rush for the sprayer whenever they spot an insect in the garden. The problem is, not all garden insects are harmful. Some, in fact, benefit the gardener by eating other insects that damage plants.

Instead of spraying indiscriminately, learn which insects are beneficial and take advantage of the natural pest control they provide. The University of

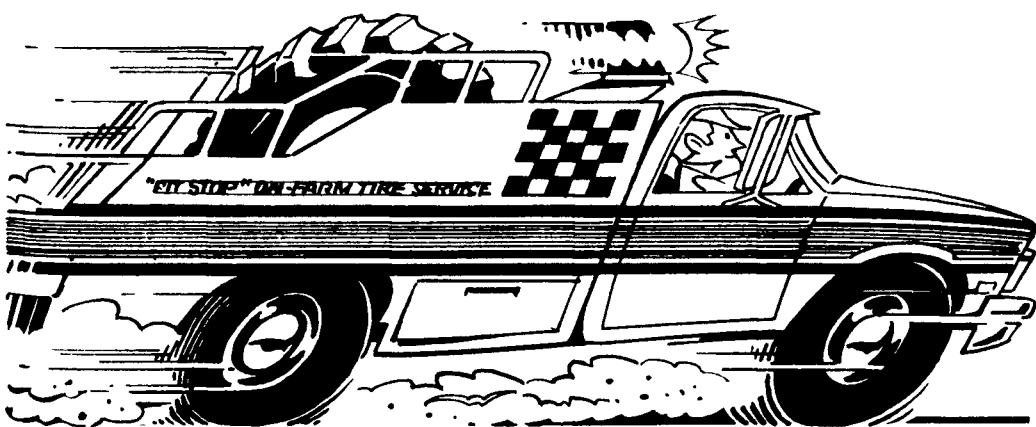
Delaware Cooperative Extension Service offers a free illustrated fact sheet, "Biological Control Agents Found in Home Gardens," which will help gardeners recognize beneficial insects. The fact sheet also discusses biological insecticides.

To obtain a copy, contact the county extension office in Newark (451-2506); Dover (736-1448); or Georgetown (856-5250).

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