

# It's Time For The Gypsy Moth

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — Late April and early May gypsy moth eggs masses hatch and release a very hungry army of gypsy moth caterpillars. The caterpillars are the destructive stage of the moth. The amount of defoliation over the past three years has been declining. The Bureau of Forestry estimated 640,000 acres of Pennsylvania's woodlands were defoliated by the gypsy moth in 1992. This is down from the 1.2 million acres in 1991 and the 4.3 million acres in 1990.

Depending on local weather conditions, the young hairy caterpillars (larvae) emerge and start a feeding frenzy that lasts about two months. The young caterpillars feed on the foliage night and day where the wind currents can move them about the neighborhood. Then in late May the caterpillars molt again and are about half-grown. At this stage the caterpillars feed only during the night and travel down the tree to seek shade during the daytime. The larvae mature in mid-June to early July, where the larvae pupate and emerge as adult moths. The female moths are white and do not fly whereas the males are buff-colored and fly readily during the day.

Homeowners can reduce damage to their trees and shrubs by finding and destroying the moths' buff-colored egg masses in winter or early spring. To determine potential for gypsy moth defoliation on your lot you must first count the number of viable egg masses. In several different areas you should stake out a plot (circle)

that is 18.5 feet diameter. Count all of the viable egg masses in this area. You may need binoculars to count the egg masses high up in the tree. Multiply this number by 40. Be sure to take counts from several different areas and average the counts. This provides a more representative estimate of the potential for defoliation. Viable egg masses are rigid masses, whereas the soft masses are last years masses that have already hatched. The threshold for potential damage is as follows: residential areas - 250 egg masses per acre and woodlot areas - 500 egg masses per acre.

For residential areas this is only 6-7 egg masses per plot (18.5 feet diameter). The threshold is lower in residential areas because of the droppings from the gypsy moths which litters, cars, decks, walkways, lawn furniture, and people. The defoliation may not be as great but the droppings are unsightly. Also some people are allergic to the caterpillars. The hairs can cause a rash that varies from faint reddish spots to patches of inflamed skin with blister-like wheals. The wheals disappear in 12 to 18 hours and the rash fades in a few days. Children appear to be more prone to the problem than adults.

Homeowners can reduce damage to their trees and shrubs by finding and destroying the moths' buff-colored egg masses in winter or early spring. But if you didn't take that precaution, or if your property is infested by wind-blown caterpillars from other locations, there are several ways

to protect your landscape from defoliation. Penn State entomologist Gregory Hoover says several non-chemical measures have proven effective in controlling the pest. One of the most popular methods is "banding." To do this, in late May encircle the trunk of a tree at chest height with a 14-to 18-inch wide piece of burlap and tie a rope or cord around its middle. Fold the top half down, creating a skirt around the trunk of the tree. Near the end of each day, collect and destroy any caterpillars that have gathered under the flap.

Banding takes advantage of the caterpillars' tendency to come down from the tree during the day and seek a sheltered resting place. "Although I wouldn't recommend this method for a property owner with hundreds of trees, it can significantly reduce defoliation on individual trees in your yard," said Hoover.

Hoover says commercially available barrier tape also can be applied to trees. Barrier tape is treated with a sticky substance that reduces the chance that a caterpillar will gain access to the crown of the tree by climbing the trunk.

Another good defense is to maintain a variety of healthy, vigorous plants that can withstand the stress of gypsy moth feeding and attract songbirds and other natural predators. "Although gypsy moths feed on about 300 varieties of trees and shrubs, they prefer oak,"

said Hoover. "You'll discourage gypsy moths if you maintain diversity in your landscape." Some species Hoover recommends are ash, dogwood, honeylocust, horse chestnut, mulberry, rhododendron, sycamore and yellow or tulip poplar.

Hoover says there are more than a dozen biological and chemical pesticides available for fight-

ing the gypsy moth. But he cautions that application timing can be critical, and some chemicals may be harmful to certain landscape plants and the gypsy moth's natural enemies. If you choose to use pesticides, be sure to carefully read and follow label instructions.

For more information about the gypsy moth, contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension office in your county.

## Disaster Program On Crop Corn

YORK (York Co.) — Secretary Espy has announced that a special disaster program on corn is available to producers who experienced reduced crop quality.

The application period is April 14 through May 7. In general, producers who sold grain at grade 5 or "sample" levels will most likely be eligible.

The requirement to purchase 1993 multiperil crop insurance

applies if the farm's adjusted production for the crop is less than 35 percent of the expected production. FCIC has extended the 1993 corn sales closing date through May 7.

York County producers who believe they are eligible for this new program should contact the York County ASCS Office at 120 Pleasant Acres Rd., York, PA 17402, (717) 755-2801.

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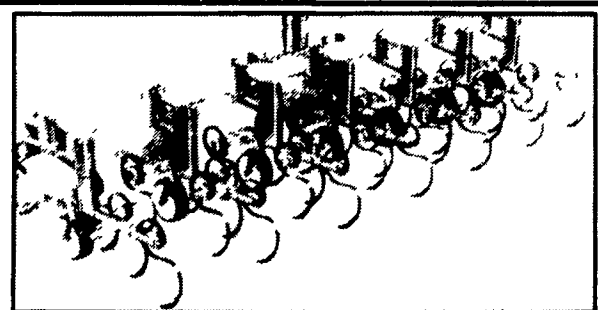
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