

## **Spongy Moths** *(formally known as Gypsy Moths)*

Information provided by the City of Portage Environmental Board

### **What are they?**

Spongy moths are a common pest species that feeds on the leaves of many trees common to Southwest Michigan, such as oaks, aspens, and willow trees. Spongy moth caterpillars have paired red and blue spots, yellow and black heads, and long, dark hairs that distinguish them from other local caterpillars. The caterpillars become active in May and consume foliage until they create their cocoons in July. Adult moths emerge in late July/early August to mate and lay eggs. The eggs lie dormant over the winter before emerging the following spring to resume the cycle.

### **Will they kill my trees?**

Most healthy trees can survive even complete defoliation for a few years. If there are no additional stressors, most trees can recover from a spongy moth infestation. Ensuring your trees are well watered and cared for during the infestation incident can go a long way towards assisting with their long-term health and survival.

### **What controls can be utilized to limit/prevent outbreaks?**

There are numerous controls that can be used for spongy moths. The most basic of these would be to examine your trees for egg masses and remove them during the July/August egg-laying season. The egg masses are tan and covered in small hairs, ranging from ½" – 3" long. These can be scraped off the tree and destroyed, which will assist in limiting the gypsy moth population the following year. In addition, remove all dead/decaying organic material from your yard, and make sure any lawn furniture or other outdoor fixtures are thoroughly cleaned and inspected for egg masses. Spongy moth traps can be purchased and utilized, as well as pest barriers that can be applied to tree trunks to prevent the caterpillars from moving into the foliage. Bacillus thuringiensis, azadirachtin, or spinosad compounds can be sprayed onto leaves as a natural pesticide solution, all of which are commercially available. It is also possible to limit the population of spongy moths by encouraging the presence of their natural predators (birds, mice, predatory insects) by avoiding the use of insecticides and creating an environment that is attractive to these animals.

### **Summary**

Spongy moth infestations can be unsightly and worrisome to homeowners who are concerned for the health of their trees. These pests can be controlled through early identification and intervention, but in the worst case, these infestations are cyclical and will pass on their own after a few years. For further information, the Michigan State University Department of Forestry has several publicly available resources for further research and consideration. The presence of an infestation can be reported via the <https://www.michigan.gov/invasives> website.



Adult Moth



Moth Eggs



Moth Caterpillar