



Lymantria dispar spongy moth

Why Observe?

European spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) caterpillars feed on deciduous trees, causing major defoliation and tree mortality. They are considered one of the worst forest pests in the United States. Spongy moth egg masses hatch in late spring and the caterpillars feed extensively on many types of trees, favoring oaks, birches and poplars. Spongy moth caterpillars spend the day hidden in leaf litter or under bark, and ascend their tree at night to feed.

We forecast caterpillar emergence based on growing degree days. Certain control measures are most effective when caterpillars have recently emerged from their egg masses.



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[Jon Yuschock, Bugwood.org](https://bugwood.org/). CC BY-NC 3.0

Tips for Identification

Adult male spongy moths are brown with black markings and have feathered antennae. Females are white with black markings and have straight, thread-like antennae. Caterpillars are hairy, with five pairs of blue dots followed by six pairs of red dots, and can grow over 3" in length by the time they pupate.

Be aware that there is variation from individual to individual within a species, so your insect may not look exactly like the one pictured. If you are uncertain whether or not a phenophase is occurring, report a "?" for its status until it becomes clear what you are observing after subsequent visits.



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[John Ghent, Bugwood.org](https://bugwood.org/). CC BY 3.0



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Adults

One or more adults are seen moving about or at rest. For *Lymantria dispar*, females are tannish-white and cannot fly, while males are mottled brown and gray and fly in search of females.



Thomas Palmer

Mating

A male and female are seen coupled in a mating position, usually end to end. This can occur at rest or in flight. For *Lymantria dispar*, females are flightless so mating does not occur in flight.



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Egg laying

A female is seen laying eggs on a plant or other surface. If possible, record the name of the plant or describe it in the comments field. For *Lymantria dispar*, eggs may be deposited on tree trunks or other outdoor surfaces.



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Eggs

One or more eggs are seen on a plant or other surface. If possible, record the name of the plant or describe it in the comments field. For *Lymantria dispar*, eggs are enclosed in a large, teardrop-shaped mass covered with yellowish-tan hairs. Do not include empty egg masses after the caterpillars have chewed their way out of the eggs.



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Pupae

One or more pupae are seen in a cocoon or shell (puparium). For *Lymantria dispar*, pupae are enclosed in a dark brown shell with a few tufts of tan hairs, and are often hidden in cracks, crevices or on the underside of branches or other outdoor surfaces. Do not include empty pupal shells after the adult has emerged from them.



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Caterpillars

One or more caterpillars (larvae) are seen moving about or at rest. When seen on a plant, if possible, record the name of the plant or describe it in the comments field. For *Lymantria dispar*, young caterpillars are buff or black in color and covered with tan hairs. Older caterpillars are black with long, tan hairs and have red and blue dots on their back.



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Caterpillars feeding

One or more caterpillars are seen feeding. If possible, record the name of the species or substance being eaten or describe it in the comments field. For *Lymantria dispar*, caterpillars feed on the leaves of trees, shrubs and other plants.

Phenophases not pictured: Dead adults, Dead caterpillars, Individuals at a light, Individuals in a net, Individuals in a trap