



## THE MOTHS

Male and female gypsy moths look different. The males are brown, with several black wing markings. As with other moths, the male gypsy moths have noticeable, feathery antennae. The wing span of the male moth is about 1½ inches.

Female moths are white or cream colored with distinctive black wavy lines or markings on the wings. Female moths are larger than the males with a wingspan of about 2 inches. Although their wings are fully formed, females do not fly. The males have complete flight capability.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT THE GYPSY MOTH IN IOWA

Check your trees for the following signs of a gypsy moth infestation:

- defoliation of your trees in May, June, or July;
- caterpillars (with blue and red dots) on the branches or leaves;
- egg masses in fall and winter.

*Prepared by John Haanstad, state entomologist, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship; and Donald Lewis, extension entomologist, Iowa State University.*



**PATTY JUDGE**  
Secretary of Agriculture

File: Pest Management 5

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**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
University Extension

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## LEARN TO KNOW



## THE GYPSY MOTH

The gypsy moth is a serious pest of trees and shrubs. It damages the plants when the caterpillar stage eats the leaves. When there are many caterpillars, they defoliate entire trees, which can weaken and sometimes kill the trees.

The gypsy moth is a notorious hitchhiker; it has been brought into Iowa on recreational vehicles and nursery stock. Learning to recognize the gypsy moth is an important part of preventing infestations and severe damage to Iowa's forests, woodlands, and urban landscapes.

## LIFE CYCLE

The gypsy moth must pass through four growth stages to complete its life cycle. Each of these stages — egg, caterpillar (larva), pupa, and adult moth — occurs at a specific time of the year, and each stage is distinct in appearance.



### THE EGG MASS

Gypsy moth females lay their eggs in a fuzz-covered mass during late summer. The egg mass is present between late July and mid-April of the following year and resembles a tan or buff colored piece of fungus. It may be the size of a nickel or as large as a 50-cent piece.

Egg masses can be stuck to almost any object, and may be well hidden — for example, in a crack of a tree trunk, in an old paint can, under a rock, in the wheelwells of vehicles, or on firewood.

## PREFERRED HOSTS

Gypsy moth caterpillars prefer to eat the leaves of oak, apple, basswood, hawthorn, willow, and birch. However, they will feed on over 200 other kinds of trees and shrubs.



### THE CATERPILLAR

The caterpillars or larvae of an infestation of gypsy moths in Iowa would be seen between late April and mid-July. Gypsy moth caterpillars feed at night and hide in shady spots during the day until they reach their full-grown size. Then they feed both night and day.

You can recognize gypsy moth caterpillars by looking for 5 pairs of blue dots or knobs, followed by 6 pairs of red dots along the top side of the caterpillar. This marking is distinctive of the gypsy moth caterpillar. Caterpillars start out only  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch long, but grow to almost 3 inches long by the time they are full grown.



### THE PUPA

The pupa stage occurs in June or July. The gypsy moth does not spin a silken cocoon to surround the pupa the way many of our other common moths do. Pupae may be located on tree trunks or in dead leaves or other protective places on the ground. Inside the hard pupa is where the transformation from caterpillar to moth takes place. After the adult moth emerges from the pupa, the empty case may remain in place for several months.

**If you think you have a gypsy moth, preserve it (in rubbing alcohol if possible) and contact:**

Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land  
Stewardship, Entomology Section.  
515-242-5180

or

Department of Natural Resources,  
Forestry Division  
515-242-5966

or

Iowa State University  
Extension Entomology  
515-294-1101