

ask the expert

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Gypsy moth infestation

We are seeing an increase in the number of gypsy moth infestations in our area in recent years. How do you distinguish these gypsy moths from other similar caterpillars who cause defoliation through this feeding?

— OHIO

The gypsy moth problem has been increasing in recent years in northeastern Ohio. The eastern strain is mostly found in the northeastern United States and eastern Canada. The gypsy moths overwinter in beige colored egg masses covered with short hairs. The eggs in this strain hatch in late April through May in Ohio. The other strain, called Asian, is found in western Canada and has been reportedly eradicated.

The young larvae hatch in spring and the small larvae feed by day, but as they go through five moltings and get larger, they begin feeding at night and moving to sheltered places during the daytime. This is when the burlap wrapping around trunks might be useful. However, some larvae may walk on top of burlap and escape. Trapping under burlap wrapping and discarding may eliminate a few larvae, but the larvae can move from one tree to another by producing silken threads and ballooning, spreading from tree to tree.

Fully grown larvae can be 60 mm in length, hairy, and have two rows of spots down their backs. The first five pairs are blue and the next six pairs are red. The maturing larvae feed singly and aggressively at night, and their droppings come down like raindrops.

By July, larvae mature and seek areas such as bark, lower sides of branches, bark

crevices, picnic tables, and house walls to pupate. Pupation lasts about 14 days and adult moths, light brown with black markings on the wings, emerge to mate. Females are larger than males. In the European strain, the females lay beige colored eggs (300-1,000) near their pupal case and don't fly. With the Asian strain, females can fly after mating and spread the egg masses.

Extensive larval feeding during May and June can cause premature defoliation. Oaks, poplars and maples can be defoliated by summer and prompted to produce new leaves using the stored energy. Yearly infestation can make the trees more susceptible to other problems. Oaks affected by gypsy moths can often become susceptible to borer and oak wilt diseases.

If practiced properly, burlap wrapping to collect and discard large larvae can be effective in managing gypsy moths. Another method is to remove the egg masses as much as possible. When the larvae are small, a bacterial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a biological control agent, can be used. As they get larger, use products such as Sevin, Conserve, or Talstar.

One moth larvae that looks like the gypsy moth is the Eastern tent caterpillar. Unlike the gypsy moth, the latter produces egg masses on branch terminals. The newly hatched young caterpillars move to branch crotch areas, build webs and hide inside during the daytime. At night, they come out and feed. The larvae do not have colored dots like gypsy moths.

Black vine weevil damage

Quite often we find adult black vine weevil feeding damage as well as scale

problem on ground cover type euonymus. How do we manage this?

— MICHIGAN

For managing euonymus scale, apply horticultural oil as a dormant spray in late fall or early spring. Oil can also be used as a foliar treatment throughout the entire growing season. However, mid-June, early July, and again in early November would be the peak application periods for using other contact insecticides such as Talstar.

For managing black vine weevil adults, apply pesticides such as Orthene, Talstar or Dursban on foliage. Treat the foliage at 3- to 4-week intervals from early May through August. Keep monitoring for any new feeding activity. You may not find the adults out during the day because they feed at night. If you find new feeding activity (notching on leaves), treat again. Continue treating at 3- to 4-week intervals until no living adults are found.

To monitor for black vine weevil activity, check the plants at night after 9 p.m. Place white paper or a cloth under the plant and shake the leaves and branches. If the adults are present, they will fall on the white paper or cloth. Another easy option is to collect the adults in traps. Simply bury a container at the soil line and cover it with some cardboard or plywood. Black vine weevil adults will usually take shelter in the container during the day time.

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SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO: "Ask the Expert" Landscape Management; 7500 Old Oak Blvd.; Cleveland, OH 44130, or email: sgibson@advanstar.com. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear.

