



LANDSCAPE · NURSERY · GARDEN CENTER

**Media Contact:**

Sue Markgraf  
GreenMark Public Relations, Inc.  
847-970-9160  
[smarkgraf@greenmarkpr.com](mailto:smarkgraf@greenmarkpr.com)

**For Immediate Release**

**Gypsy Moth Caterpillars will Soon Hatch in Spring Landscapes**

*Advice from the Professionals at Chalet*

**WILMETTE, Ill. (Feb. 12, 2009)** – Non-native gypsy moths – first sighted in Cook County a couple years ago – will soon be hatching stinky, noisy offspring that will eat almost anything leafy and green.

While gypsy moth, *Lymantria dispar*, caterpillars prefer oak, hickory, apple, crabapple, linden, maple, willow and white birch the professionals at Chalet, Wilmette, Ill., say the offspring will feed on about 500 different kinds of trees and shrubs, and have been known to strip bare entire trees. One caterpillar can eat up to a square foot of foliage per day, taking a severe bite out of northern Illinois landscapes from April through June.

“A single gypsy moth can lay an egg mass with up to a thousand eggs,” says Troy Ripley, Chalet landscape designer. “In spring, the egg masses will hatch and caterpillars up to ¼-inch will fall from the trees with small silken threads intended to carry them to new areas. This ‘parachuting’ behavior can carry them up to six miles from where they hatched.”

Accidentally introduced more than 100 years ago in Boston, male gypsy moths are brown with black markings and have a wingspan of 1½ inches. Females, which can’t fly because of the weight of their eggs, are slightly larger and are typically white or cream-colored.

Female gypsy moths lay their eggs on any convenient surface, including fences, homes and vehicles as well as tree trunks and branches. They also seek out protected locations, such as inside lawn furniture framing, under siding and inside spruce trees. If you see one egg mass chances are there are more and you really need to search hard to find them.

The egg masses are rock-hard raised, tear-dropped shaped forms covered with tan or buff-colored hairs. They range from three-quarter to 2 inches long.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture placed Lake County under quarantine in 2000 and added Cook, DuPage and McHenry counties in 2007. This means that all nursery and lumber

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## **Chalet/Gypsy Moth//Add One**

products must be inspected or certified before they can be moved out of the four counties. Residents are asked to inspect vehicles, tents, outdoor lawn furniture, bicycles and other outdoor items for gypsy moth egg masses, live moths and caterpillars before taking them from the quarantined area.

“All caterpillars will be concerned about is eating and growing,” Ripley says. “They will be hungry and looking for food. Caterpillars can be carried by hitching a ride by car or other transportation without our knowledge.” While the adult Gypsy Moth does not really pose an environmental threat, he says their offspring very much do.

“Trees and shrubs use their leaves to produce energy to grow,” Ripley says. “Since the caterpillar feeds on these leaves it can weaken or kill the plant. If the plant is stripped of its leaves early in the season, it will often produce more leaves in an attempt to grow and thrive. Healthy hardwood trees, such as oaks, can withstand one or two consecutive years of losing 50 percent or more of its leaves per season, but the tree will be stressed from the trauma. If defoliation happens during a period of drought, or if the plant is stressed due to construction or transplanting, it may be lost with a single defoliation.”

Some experts believe the potential devastation caused by gypsy moth caterpillars may rival and even exceed that of the Asian long-horned beetle or emerald ash borer, but Tony Fulmer, Chalet’s retail manager, says there are some things you can do if you find egg masses on your property. (See related sidebar for more recommendations.)

“Pretest surfaces for staining and then suffocate egg masses in place with a horticultural or soybean oil-based insecticide,” he says. “You can also use a trowel or other sharp-edged object to scrape the nest off its surface, but don’t handle caterpillars or egg masses with bare hands. Wear gloves or use a putty knife to dislodge them since the hairs may cause a mild allergic reaction.”

Once removed, destroy nests by drowning them in soapy water for two days or bury them in 6 to 12 inches of soil. “Don’t just knock them off to the ground,” Fulmer says. “They will survive and hatch in the spring.”

**Editors, please note:** High-resolution digital images are available for the sample images that follow. Sidebar provided below photos.



gypsy moth caterpillar



gypsy moth females



gypsy moths laying eggs

**Sidebar:**

**Tony Fulmer's Top 10 Things to Know about Gypsy Moths**

WILMETTE, Ill. (Feb. 21, 2009) – Once upon a time there was a well-intentioned man who imported some moths from across the sea to breed with silkworms to produce stronger fibers. Unfortunately, the moths escaped.

More than 100 years later, they've made their way to the Chicago area. If the thought of creepy little caterpillars frolicking in your trees and garden makes your hair stand on end, Tony Fulmer, retail manager at Chalet, Wilmette, Ill., offers these facts to understand the potential gypsy moth caterpillars have to cause serious damage to a wide range of landscape plants.

- 1.) Gypsy moths are very indiscriminate in their food preferences, commonly eating up to 500 different species of trees and shrubs. They love oaks, which are usually their first preference. However, ashes (already threatened by Emerald Ash Borer) and honeylocust are low on their dietary list of interest. It is important to understand that once evergreen trees are defoliated, they do not produce leaves again.
- 2.) Caterpillars are the immature stage of the gypsy moth and the only stage in their lifecycle to eat and cause damage. Unfortunately, they feed for four to six weeks before pupating. A single caterpillar can eat up to a square foot of leaf surface per day.
- 3.) Upon hatching, they feed in the tree canopy, climbing down the trunk during the day to hide from predators, returning at night to resume eating. If populations are very high, they may not leave the tree and their "place at the banquet."
- 4.) In the Chicago area, expect the first caterpillars to emerge about the time Saucer Magnolia drops its showy pink-and-white petals. Feeding occurs during May and June. Caterpillars "pupate" (a non-feeding, cocoon-like stage) for several weeks before emerging as adults in July and August to mate and lay the next generation of eggs.

## Chalet/Gypsy Moth//Add Three

- 5.) Females are white with visibly v-shaped markings on their wings, but are basically flightless. Males are attracted by pheromones and fly to the females for mating. Egg masses can be up to 2-inch ovals containing up to 1,000 eggs each.
- 6.) Both caterpillars and the tannish-brown egg masses are covered with coarse hairs that can cause a mild allergic reaction if it comes in direct contact with human skin. Handle with gloves only.
- 7.) Since females are not capable of travelling even short distances, gypsy moths have been spread by egg masses laid on flat surfaces like firewood, campers, trailer, cars and lawn chairs. They are then innocently transported around the country to hatch and infest new areas.
- 8.) Where gypsy moths are well established in the United States, there appears to be a somewhat predictable population swell. Then every 10 years or so, a crash occurs. The population starts building again. Fortunately, both a gypsy moth-specific virus and fungus have been imported with them and are established. When weather and natural conditions are favorable, both can cause dramatic declines in gypsy moth populations.
- 9.) Due to the long disagreeable hairs on the caterpillars, birds are unfortunately not considered serious predators. Deer mice, on the other hand, are given credit for enjoying both the caterpillars and the pupae. This will occur more in woodland areas where undergrowth is long and mice are protected from their own predators, such as hawks and owls. Deer mice are less apt to be found in mowed lawn areas.
- 10.) If you see egg masses around your property, dislodge them (wearing gloves only). Bury them 6- to 12-inches deep in soil, soak them in warm soapy water for two days, or microwave them for 2 minutes on high. With their tremendous reproductive potential, destroying even a few egg masses can make a difference in the damage you experience in your landscape.

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*Chalet has been ranked the No. 1 independent garden center in Illinois and No. 16 in the country for 2008 by Nursery Retailer Magazine. The 91-year-old company was named the most innovative garden center in America in 2007. The garden center is located at 3132 Lake St. in Wilmette, Ill., just off the Edens Expressway. Chalet's landscape division is housed on a 28,000-square-foot complex on 16 acres in North Chicago, Ill. Chalet also operates a 183-acre growing nursery in Salem, Wis. For information, call 847-256-0561 or visit [www.ChaletNursery.com](http://www.ChaletNursery.com)*

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