

Spongy Moths



Spongy moth adult with egg mass. Photo: Jim Occi, BugPics, Bugwood.org



Spongy moth caterpillar. Photo: John Ghent, Bugwood.org

What Are They?

Spongy moths include *Lymantria dispar asiatica*, *Lymantria dispar dispar*, and other invasive moths including rosy moths (*Lymantria mathura*) and nun moths (*Lymantria monacha*). The spongy moths are one of the worst American forest pest insects. They devour the leaves of more than five hundred different species of trees and shrubs and cause enormous damage to the environment and the economy.

Are They Here Yet?

Most spongy moths are brought to new areas by people, and Washington sees new introductions every year. Eradication efforts by the Washington State Department of Agriculture have prevented spongy moths from becoming established here. The department conducts annual surveys to find new introductions and every summer places twenty thousand traps throughout the state. It also works across regional borders to ensure that the Pacific Northwest does not end up permanently infested.

Why Should I Care?

Due to their voracious appetite and ability to reproduce, spongy moths cause incredible damage to forests, nurseries, vegetation along creeks and rivers, and trees and shrubs in yards and parks. They also alter wildlife habitats and affect the quality of life in communities that experience repeated outbreaks. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that the economic cost of spongy moths has averaged \$30 million a year for the past twenty years, mostly due to quarantines imposed on timber and agricultural products.



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Spongy moth egg masses are light brown when fresh. Photo: Ferenc Lakatos, University of Sopron, Bugwood.org

What Are Their Characteristics?

- Spongy moth adult males are light brown. *Lymantria dispar dispar* moth females are white, do not fly, and have dark zigzags on their wings.
- The spongy moth has a wingspan of about 1 1/2 inches.
- Eggs masses of 100 or more are laid on branches or other sheltered places. The masses are buff colored when freshly laid and will pale as they age.
- Mature larvae are covered in light-colored tufted hairs with 5 pairs of blue bumps followed by 6 pairs of red bumps down the back.
- The pupae (or resting stage between the caterpillar larva and adult moth) is a dark brick red and usually found under tree bark and crevices or other protected areas.



Spongy moth traps are usually green. Please do not disturb them. Photo: Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

How Do I Distinguish It From Native Species

Two native caterpillar species, the tent caterpillar and the fall webworm, can resemble spongy moth caterpillars. However, neither have the red and blue bump combination down the back. Additionally, the tent caterpillar builds large, web-like tents.

How Can We Stop Them?

Spongy moths primarily are introduced by people. So, please take precautions when traveling to infested areas to avoid bringing eggs back on cars, recreation vehicles, and outdoor supplies. Please do not remove or vandalize traps. Follow quarantine rules and do not transport any firewood or other outdoor material from infested areas.

What Should I Do If I Find One?

Report immediately via the WA Invasives mobile app or reporting web form at <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/report-a-sighting/>