



Spongy Moth Program Frequently Asked Questions

St. Clair County Spongy Moth (formerly Gypsy Moth) Suppression Program
A cooperative program between the County of St. Clair and Friends of the St. Clair River



Q. Which trees are most susceptible to spongy moth predation?

A. Spongy moth prefer many different trees species for caterpillar feeding. These include all oak species, apple, basswood, box elder maple, chestnut, mountain ash and paper birch.

Q. Why are oaks highly preferred by spongy moth?

A. All oak species are preferred by spongy moth due to higher nutrient levels in their leaves. Oak trees are also some of the earliest trees to leaf-out in the spring when the spongy moth larvae are hatching and looking for food.

Q. Can egg masses be on any tree?

A. Spongy moth egg masses can be found on any type of tree, as well as on sheds, house siding, RVs, outdoor furniture, signs, firewood, etc. They do not exclusively lay eggs on the trees they feed on. Female spongy moth looks for a semi-sheltered place to lay her eggs, such as under bark flaps, under awnings, or in small crevices.

Q. Can spongy moth kill trees?

A. Trees completely defoliated by spongy moth caterpillars may appear dead. However, healthy trees will “re-flush” and produce a second set of leaf buds, usually by late July. This second set of leaves will provide enough energy for the tree to survive winter. Severe defoliation does stress the tree, but trees can usually tolerate complete defoliation for a few years. If trees are affected by other stress factors, such as severe drought, disease, or poor growing conditions, there is a greater chance severe defoliation will lead to canopy dieback or in severe cases, individual tree mortality.

Q. What happens if spongy moth defoliated my conifer?

A. If spongy moth defoliates more than 50% of a conifer tree, the tree will not have enough energy to completely re-leaf and is likely to die. However, dead trees can be beneficial for the ecosystem so it may not be necessary to cut a defoliated conifer immediately.

Q. Do spongy moth cause skin irritation?

A. Spongy moth caterpillars have long hairs along its body that have been known to cause skin irritation to those that handle the caterpillars with their bare hands. Spongy moth egg masses also are covered with hairs that can potentially cause irritation, although it is uncommon. For those with sensitive skin, wear gloves when smashing caterpillars or scraping egg masses.

Q. Who is conducting spongy moth surveys?

A. Friends of the St. Clair River staff and trained volunteers are leading spongy moth surveys.

Q. When will surveys take place in St. Clair County?

A. Surveys will begin in mid-September and continue through December.

Q. How will I know when staff are doing a survey on my land?

A. A staff person from Friends of the St. Clair River will make an attempt to contact property owners by phone, email, or in-person before beginning a survey. After the survey is completed, a data sheet containing the survey findings will be left for the property owner.

Q. Can I scrape egg masses off my trees?

A. Property owners should wait until after January 1 to begin scraping egg masses. Egg masses that have been scraped or destroyed cannot be counted for surveys. Waiting until January 1 allows surveyors time to complete their surveys. Watch for more information in early 2022 about how to scrape egg masses.

Q. How high in the trees are surveyors looking for egg masses?

A. Surveyors bring binoculars to look high up into trees for egg masses but use the lower reachable egg masses to determine their age and condition. This is one important reason not to scrape egg masses until after January 1.

Q. Is there a surveying protocol so property owners can perform and submit their own survey data?

A. Friends of the St. Clair River is holding multiple volunteer trainings to demonstrate how to do egg mass surveys. Visit www.scriver.org to see a complete list of upcoming events.

Q. Is St. Clair County going to have a spraying program in the spring?

A. The St. Clair County Spongy Moth Suppression Program is new and there is not yet enough data to support decisions about aerial spraying. Residents will be kept informed as the program and surveys progress. Follow Friends of the St. Clair River's social media pages, subscribe to their e-newsletter, and visit Friends of the St. Clair River and St. Clair County's websites for updates.

Q. How do I report my property to be surveyed?

A. Web: www.stclaircounty.org/Caterpillars/CaterpillarsSurvey.aspx
Phone: 810-294-4965
Email: gypsymoth@stclaircounty.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION
