

# Not All Alien Invaders Are From Outer Space ☾☽



These twin terrors  
could eat their way  
clear across America...

Gypsy Moth and Asian Gypsy Moth  
*Lymantria dispar* (Linnaeus)

## Gypsy Moth and Asian Gypsy Moth, *Lymantria dispar* (Linnaeus)

In 1869, a French naturalist living near Boston imported gypsy moths into the United States in an attempt to breed them with silkworms. Some gypsy moth caterpillars escaped during his experiments, and these natives of Europe, Asia, and North Africa found the climate of Massachusetts excellent for their survival.

Descendants of those first gypsy moths currently infest all or part of 15 U.S. States. This pest eats the foliage of many hardwood trees, especially oaks.

In 1993, a ship docked at Wilmington, NC, and opened its cargo hold. Out flew dozens of Asian gypsy moths—Asiatic relatives of the European gypsy moth that share the same scientific name and look just like the gypsy moths already common in America. This new pest is even more threatening to U.S. trees. It eats foliage from both hardwoods and conifers, making it dangerous to commercial softwood operations like Christmas-tree farms and tree nurseries in the Northwest and the Deep South. Plus, female Asian gypsy moths can fly (European females can't). This capability makes it much easier for Asian gypsy moth populations to spread quickly into uninfested areas.

Since 1993, Asian gypsy moths popped out of cargo vessels on a few other occasions. But fortunately, State and Federal Government insect experts were able to control these small populations and keep the new Asiatic strain of gypsy moths from getting established here.

The gypsy moth has four life stages: egg, larva, pupa (cocoon), and adult. Larvae (caterpillars) are 1 to 2 inches (2–5 cm) long with "hairs" along their whole body. They are gray with five pairs of blue spots and six pairs of red spots along their

back. Adult female gypsy moths are white with brownish banding on their wings. Males are smaller and brown with bands of different shades of brown, and they have oblong brown antennae that look almost like little feathers. In appearance, the European and Asian strains of gypsy moth are almost identical. It is virtually impossible for anyone but an entomologist to tell them apart.

The current U.S. gypsy moth population can eat all the leaves on 13 million acres of trees in 1 season. Gypsy moth caterpillars also crawl on homes, get on lawn furniture and in pools, and make outdoor activities hard to enjoy. Plus, they squish under your shoes or between your toes if you are barefoot. These twin terrors could eat their way clear across America.



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