



Washington  
State Department of  
Agriculture

# Identifying Spongy Moth



## What is the spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar*)?

Spongy moth is a non-native, highly destructive threat to Washington's environment. Spongy moth caterpillars are very hungry eaters that strip trees and shrubs of their leaves and kill them. This an invasive species that was first detected in Washington in 1974. Every year, WSDA sets traps and finds new detections, but WSDA's spongy moth program has prevented the moth from becoming permanently established in our state.

## How do I identify the spongy moth?

Thanks to WSDA's consistent trapping and eradication efforts, spongy moths are rare in Washington. It is unlikely that current spongy moth populations will leave significant signs of their presence, such as defoliation or caterpillar droppings. Instead, you must look for the moth itself at its various life cycle stages.

Here is what to look for:



### Female adult spongy moth

Female spongy moths are a cream color with wide abdomens and short, thin antennae. Their wings have brown zigzag stripes. Spongy moth females do not fly, but females of their cousin - the flighted spongy moth - can.

*Generally seen  
July to September*



### Male adult spongy moth

Male spongy moths are darker and smaller than the females. They are a tan brown color and have dark zigzag markings on their wings. They also have distinct, feathery antennae which they use to located females by scent from long distances.

*Generally seen  
July to September*



### Egg masses

Females lay distinct, fluffy egg masses that can range in color from tan to off-white. Each egg mass can contain up to 1,000 eggs. Egg masses are laid in late summer and overwinter to hatch late in the spring after trees have leafed out.

*Generally seen  
August to May*



### Caterpillars

Spongy moth caterpillars start out extremely tiny but rapidly grow up to three inches long. As they grow, they can be easily identified by their yellow head, hairy body, and distinct **five pairs of blue dots** followed by **six pairs of red dots** on their backs.

*Generally seen  
April to June*

## Don't be fooled - spongy moth look-alikes

There are two common caterpillars in the northwest which are often confused for the spongy moth: the tent caterpillar (seen in the spring) and the fall webworm (seen in the fall). Both of these caterpillars create silken webs or "tents" (the spongy moth doesn't do this) and neither has the red and blue dot markings of the spongy moth caterpillar.



Get more information about spongy moth identification and control at [agr.wa.gov/moths](http://agr.wa.gov/moths)