



Washington
State Department of
Agriculture

Spongy Moth Quick Facts



What is the spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar dispar* and *Lymantria dispar asiatica*)?

Spongy moth is a non-native, highly destructive threat to Washington's environment. Two primary kinds of spongy moth have been detected in Washington: the spongy moth and the flighted spongy moth. Spongy moth caterpillars are voracious eaters that defoliate and kill trees. Spongy moth is an invasive species that was first detected in the state in 1974. Washington sees more spongy moth introductions than any other western state.

Why should I be concerned about the spongy moth?

Spongy moths feed on hundreds of species of trees and shrubs. In states where the pest is established, infestations can defoliate entire swaths of trees in neighborhoods, parks, and state and national forests - killing millions of trees during outbreaks. This can lead to degraded stream quality, loss of habitat and food for other wildlife including threatened species, and warmer water temperatures, leading to the death or displacement of salmon, steelhead, and other fish. Some people are also allergic to the caterpillars, breaking out in rashes or hives when coming in contact with the spongy moth caterpillar hairs.

How is spongy moth arriving in Washington?

Spongy moths usually hitchhike to Washington on vehicles or outdoor items when people travel or relocate from infested states to the northwest. Flighted spongy moths are most often introduced through the ports.

What is the difference between the spongy moth and the flighted spongy moth?

While both types of moths are extreme threats to the environment, the flighted spongy moth is even more so for two reasons:

1. Unlike the spongy moth, **the flighted spongy moth female can fly**, allowing the populations to spread more quickly.
2. While the spongy moth feeds primarily on deciduous trees, **the flighted spongy moth also readily feeds on evergreens**, which is particularly problematic in the Evergreen State.



What is being done to protect our state from spongy moth?

The Washington State Legislature has charged the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) with preventing spongy moth from becoming established in our state. WSDA's spongy moth program traps each year to monitor for spongy moth introductions. Based on the annual trapping results and in consultation with state and national experts, WSDA drafts treatment proposals when necessary to prevent permanent spongy moth populations from establishing. After assessing potential environmental impacts of the plan, conducting extensive public outreach, and making the environmental assessment available for public review and comment, WSDA finalizes the plan and conducts the eradication. Finally, follow-up trapping (and treatment, if necessary) ensures that the spongy moth is eradicated.

Get more information about spongy moth identification and control at agr.wa.gov/moths

