

## STINGING CATERpillARS

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Most people know that bees, wasps, hornets and some ants can sting to defend themselves or their nests. Only a few people realize, usually from first hand experience, that handling some caterpillars can produce some painful results. Recognizing the few stinging caterpillar species may prevent irritating encounters.

Caterpillar stages of moths often have spines and barbed hooks. Generally, these are for show and are quite harmless. But there are a few Stinging caterpillars of various shapes, sizes and colors. Stinging caterpillars possess hollow quill-like hairs, connected to poison sacs, that are used as defensive weapons. When these hairs are touched they break through the skin releasing the poison. Reactions can range from a mild itching to the more severe pain, dermatitis, and even intestinal disturbances.

### Giant Silkworm Caterpillars

Two members of this group possess poisonous spines. These are large leaf feeding caterpillars with numerous spines over the body.



Buck moth caterpillar

### Buck Moth

The two-inch long caterpillar is brown to purplish-black with numerous yellow spots. The body is protected with branched reddish spines that may have red or black tips. These can be quite common on oak or willow from spring to mid-summer. There is a single generation a year.

### Io Moth

The caterpillar is overall light green, but along each side there is a narrow reddish line bordered below by a white line. Grown caterpillars are two inches long and covered with branched, black-pointed green

spines. They feed on a variety of plants including corn, roses, willow, linden, elm, oak, locust, apple, beech, ash, currant, and clover.

### Slug-Like Caterpillars



Io moth Caterpillar

There are several species of slug-like caterpillars that have poisonous spines. Slug caterpillars are short and stocky and creep about on leaves in a slug-like manner. The head and legs are not visible. Typically, there is one generation per year with the grown larvae found in the late summer.



Puss moth caterpillar

### Puss Caterpillar

This one inch caterpillar is covered with a dense-wooly coat of soft brown hair, with hairs at the rear end tail-like. Beneath the hair are numerous short poisonous spines that can cause severe irritation. Found feeding on various trees and shrubs, including elm, maple, hack berry, oak, sycamore and others. Young caterpillars often feed in groups. Sting severity increases with size of caterpillar. Puss caterpillar stings are often more severe than those of other caterpillars.

## Saddleback Caterpillar



Saddleback caterpillar

The caterpillar is brown in front and rear, green in the middle with a purple spot in the center of the green saddle. There are prominent horns on the front and rear. Stings by this insect can cause severe irritation. Saddlebacks are typically found on deciduous trees such as basswood, chestnut, cherry, oak, and plum, but occasionally they can be found on corn.



*Euclia delphinii*

## *Euclia delphinii*

The pale yellow green caterpillar has four dark patches of spines toward the rear and numerous spiny, yellow or red fleshy lobes. Grown caterpillars have a brown area on back. It feeds on oak, beech, chestnut, willow, pear, bayberry, sour wood, wild cherry and other trees. It is less venomous than the saddleback caterpillar.



Hag moth caterpillar

## Hag Moth

A bizarre caterpillar that resembles a dried leaf. The caterpillar is brown with nine pairs of fleshy lobes, all with stinging hairs. It is found on lower branches of assorted trees and shrubs, including oak, chestnut, dogwood, sassafras and ash. The caterpillars are usually seen feeding on the lower surfaces of leaves.

## Stinging Rose Caterpillar

A yellow to red spiny caterpillar with black and blue stripes down the middle of its back and less distinct red, blue and black stripes along the side of the body. There are prominent spiny yellow horns on the front, rear and center of the body. They can be found feeding on bushes and low tree branches of redbud,



Stinging rose caterpillar

oak, hickory, bayberry, wild cherry and sycamore.

## How to Avoid Stings

Most encounters with stinging caterpillars result from accidentally brushing against leaves on which they are feeding. The chances of running into these insects are relatively low, but occasionally one species may be very abundant. Also the more time spent in wooded areas, the greater the opportunity for contact. Most of these caterpillars are distinctly marked or brightly colored. This can allow you to see and avoid them. If you find one on yourself, don't brush it off or slap it with a bare hand. Use a stick or other object to remove it carefully. Hollow spines may break off in clothing or gloves.

## First Aid For Stings

No really effective home first aid treatments for caterpillar stings are available. Adhesive tape or transparent tape may be used to pull out some of the broken spines in the sting area. Washing the area thoroughly with soap and water may help remove some of the irritating venom. Prompt application of an ice pack or baking soda may help to reduce pain and prevent swelling. Antihistaminic drugs, often administered for bee and wasp stings, are reportedly ineffective. See a physician if severe reactions occur. Very young, aged or unhealthy persons are more likely to suffer severe reaction symptoms.

## Control

Where stinging caterpillars are numerous or present hazards to persons, such as around residences, recreation areas or schools, infested shrubs and trees may be sprayed to eliminate or reduce the caterpillars. Use products containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* or carbaryl for control. Always read and follow label instructions.