

Asp or Puss Caterpillar

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FIG. 1

Type Pest: chewing insect (*Megalopyge opercularis* J. E. Smith)

Type Metamorphous: complete (egg, larva, pupa, adult stages)

Other Common Names: flannel moth, puss caterpillar

Period of Primary Occurrence: late spring to late summer

- Moths emerge in late spring to early summer to lay eggs
- One or two generations can occur each year
- Asp moth caterpillars are more commonly encountered in late summer and into the fall when they attain half to full size

Plants Affected

Oaks, pecan, elm, hackberry, dwarf yaupon, and hollies

Identifying Characteristics of Insect Pest

- Adult moth approximately 1" long with blunt wings covered with long wavy hair; wings are orange at the base and cream-colored at the tips
- Moths lay eggs that hatch into a dangerous larva (caterpillars about 1" long) with 7 pairs of prolegs (suction cup-like claspers on rear of the body)
- Caterpillars are teardrop-shaped with long silky hairs, resembling a tuft of cotton or fur (Fig. 1-5)
- Colors vary from yellow or gray to reddish-brown or a mixture of colors (Fig. 1 & 2)

Description / Symptoms

- Venomous hairs stick into the skin causing painful burning and a rash
- Other symptoms include headaches, nausea, vomiting, shock or respiratory stress
- Pain usually subsides within an hour and spots disappear within a few days
- Infests shade trees and shrubbery around homes, schools and in parks, but cause no serious damage to the plant; hazard is to children and gardeners who encounter them
- One of the most toxic caterpillars in North America
- Intense throbbing pain develops immediately or within five minutes of contact with the



FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

caterpillar

- Blood colored spots and swelling may occur at site of sting
- Severe sting happens when the asp moth caterpillar rubs or is pressed against skin

First-aid for Stings

- Ice pack applied to site of sting
- Oral antihistamines, for allergic reactions such as itching and for difficulty breathing; see a physician immediately

Best Management Practices (BMP)

- High populations of asp caterpillars can be controlled by spraying with a residual pesticide such as permethrin, cyfluthrin or other sprays labeled for control of caterpillars on ornamental plants



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Use pesticides only according to the directions on the label. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. If the information does not agree with current labeling, follow the label instructions. The label is the law.

Always remember to read and heed six of the most important words on the label: "KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN"

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