

Making a Barrier Band for Gypsy Moths

Reduce the number of gypsy moth caterpillars in your trees by putting up barrier bands before the caterpillars start to hatch in mid-May. Caterpillars crawling up the trees will mire down in the sticky material and die. Bands can keep caterpillars from migrating to other trees or from climbing back up if they fall off the tree (surprisingly common!).

Make barrier bands using duct tape and a waterproof, sticky material such as the tree goo Tanglefoot or even petroleum jelly. When the bark is dry, wrap duct tape around the tree,



shiny side out, pressing the tape firmly into the bark cracks to prevent caterpillars from slipping under the bands. The tape should be wrapped a few inches wide and placed around the tree trunk at chest height -- about four feet above the ground.

Try using sticky barriers like duct tape and petroleum jelly to trap caterpillars from May through July.
© Robert Queen

A band of duct tape is needed to protect the tree bark from the sticky material, which could disfigure or kill the tree if applied directly. Smear the sticky material along the center of the band. (If you choose to use petroleum jelly, allow at least two inches of uncoated band under the jelly as it can melt and flow downward.) Periodically check the barrier bands to make sure they have not been clogged with insects, dirt or debris. Apply more sticky material as needed; check especially after a rain. You can take the barrier bands down in late July after the gypsy moth caterpillars have pupated.

You have a third chance to kill gypsy moth if you put up and tend burlap bands. After the caterpillars get about an inch long in mid-June, they will move down the trunk to hide from predators during the day. The caterpillars will hide under the burlap and you can collect and kill large numbers of them.

To make a band, cut a strip of burlap 12-18 inches wide and long enough to reach around the tree and overlap a few inches. Tie a string around the center of the band and allow the top six inches to flop over to make a two-layered skirt. Tie the band around the tree above the sticky band (if you have one in place). Check the bands every day from early afternoon until about 6 p.m. Use rubber gloves or forceps to collect all caterpillars, pupae, adults and egg masses. Kill the caterpillars, adults and pupae by placing them in a cup of soapy water. Once the insects are dead, drain off the water and throw the insects in the trash. Take the burlap bands down in August.

Excerpt from Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine (August 1998)