

Recognizing the Douglas-Fir Tussock Moth Around Your Home



Douglas-fir tussock moth mature larva (caterpillar)

The **Douglas-fir tussock moth** is a native insect in the low-lying, dry belt Douglas-fir regions of southern British Columbia. This insect is both a private land and public forest issue. Outbreaks of tussock moth occur every 10-12 years and cause significant damage and mortality to Douglas-fir stands in these areas. Its primary hosts are **Douglas-fir, spruce and ornamental trees in urban neighbourhoods.**

During an outbreak, trees may be killed in one year because the Douglas-fir tussock moth feeds voraciously on both **new and old needles.** Defoliated trees appear reddish in colour and by July, they take on a scorched appearance.



An outbreak lasts for 2-4 years, during which serious tree mortality occurs.

The tussock moth has a one-year life cycle and overwinters as eggs. Adults appear from late July to early September. The adult female is flightless and remains close to her cocoon. She sends out pheromones to attract male moths. Mating and egg laying occur on the cocoon. Female tussock moths lay about 200 round white eggs.



Male tussock moth



Female moth on her cocoon



Egg mass on old cocoon

Caterpillars hatch in late spring and feed on the current year's needles. The young caterpillars disperse by silken threads on light winds. As they mature, they feed on both old and new foliage. Mature larvae are easily identified by **three long, black tufts: one located on the rear of the insect and two on the head.**



Young tussock moth caterpillars

During infestations, larvae and cocoons may be found on **tree branches and trunks, fences and buildings.** In an epidemic, insects may be so numerous as to be literally crawling over everything.

Tussock moths are covered in thousands of tiny hairs, which may give some people an allergic reaction, known as **tussockosis.** Avoid physical contact with the insects and wash after exposure. If tussockosis symptoms are severe, seek the advice of a physician.



Caterpillar on pine



Caterpillars on old stump

For more information on Douglas-fir tussock moth and its control, please contact:

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