BUG BIZ
Pest Management and Insect Identification Series
LSU AgCenter Research & Extension

Stinging Caterpillars

If you touch a stinging caterpillar, you will likely soon feel a burning and itching pain. The reason is that the caterpillar's spines have punctured your skin and have released a venom. The result is a swollen, red, burning, itching area.

Saddleback Caterpillar

Sibine stimulate clem.

This barbed, sluglike caterpillar has a bright brown spot in the middle of a green saddle-shaped area on its back. It has four prominent reddish-brown fleshy "horns," two near the head and two near the anal segment. This caterpillar is somewhat rectangular and is 1 inch (25mm) long when mature. It may be found on a variety of foliage.

IO Moth

Automeris io F.

This light green, spiny caterpillar has a red or reddish and white stripe on the side of the body. The stripe extends the entire length of the abdomen. The body is covered with structures bearing green stinging spines. Some larvae grow from 2-2½ inches (60mm) long when mature. This stinging caterpillar may be found on many shade trees and ornamentals.

A caterpillar sting can be serious to those who are allergic to insect toxins (stings). It can produce the same swelling and respiratory problems as bee stings. Anyone sensitive to insect bites or stings should consult a doctor when stung by a caterpillar. Pressing tape down hard on the sting and ripping it off will help to remove the spines, thus closing the wound. Application of basic materials such as Clorox, ammonia, toothpaste, meat tenderizer and baking soda slurry will help to neutralize the amino acid venom and ease the burning stinging sensations.

Puss Moth

Megalopyge opercularis A.

This caterpillar is somewhat pear shaped, with a short, thick body densely covered with yellow, gray or brown hairs. It is about 1 inch (25mm) long at maturity and may be found on several species of shade trees and ornamentals.

Buck Moth

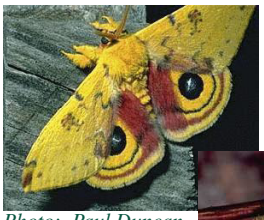
Hemileuca maia Drury

This purple-black caterpillar has a reddish head and small round white spots over its body. Several spiny structures are located on each segment of the body. When touched, these spiny structures cause a burning, itching and reddening of the areas stung. Buck moth larvae tend to cluster on branches and move about in a follow-the-leader fashion. Primary hosts include oak, willow, wild cherry, rose and several other deciduous plant species. The larval state of this species is prominent in April and May, but larvae have been collected in late May.

Control

Stinging caterpillars are a nuisance to adults, but can be serious hazards to small children, because the youngsters are attracted to the pests' bright, unusual colorations. Sprays are not normally applied except for the buck moth, since it occurs in large numbers. Control of the other species is seldom needed except for knocking an occasional specimen to the ground and mashing it. Consult the Louisiana Insect Pest Management Guide for insecticides to use and their application rates. Refer to the chapter, Lawn & Garden: Louisiana Recommendations for Ornamentals and Flowering Plants. This publication is available from your LSU AgCenter parish extension office.

Saddleback Caterpillar
Photo: Virginia Cooperative Extension

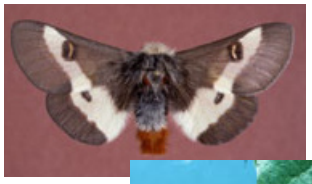


IO Moth
adult and lavva

Photo: Paul Duncan

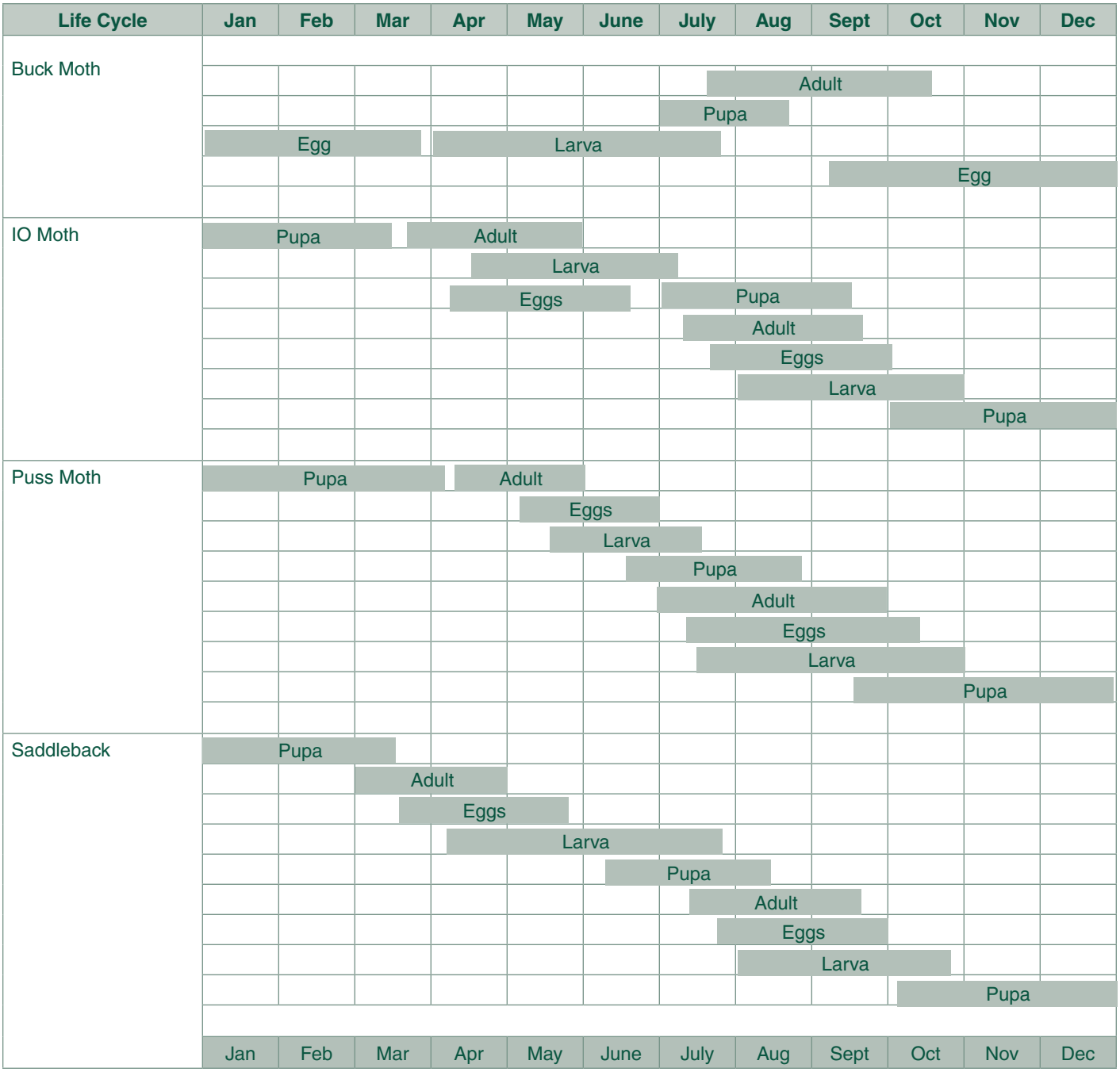
Photo: Dr. Gary Mullen. Auburn University

Puss Moth
Photo: UT Houston Medical School



Buck Moth
adult and lavva

Photo: USDA Forest Service Archives.



Author:
Dale K. Pollet, Ph.D.
Professor and Extension Specialist, Entomology
Dennis Ring, Ph. D.
Extension Entomologist

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Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
William B. Richardson, Chancellor
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
David J. Boethel, Vice Chancellor and Director
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Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director
Pub. 1979 (Online Only) 03/06 Rev.