

## Stinging caterpillars

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Did you know that some caterpillars can sting? Various caterpillars have urticating hairs or spines that are connected to a poison gland. When something, such as an arm, brushes against the hairs, the hairs stick in the skin, injecting venom and sometimes causing a rash.

Stinging caterpillars include the Io moth caterpillar, the buck moth caterpillar, the saddleback caterpillar, and the asp or puss caterpillar.

Buck moth caterpillars are brownish-black, but can also be lighter in color. These caterpillars have long, multi-branched spines in rows along the body.



Io moth caterpillar. Photo by Sturgis McKeever.

Io moth caterpillars are yellowish to green with a pinkish-red line along the side of the body. These caterpillars also have clusters of yellow or green spines in rows along the body.

Saddleback caterpillars have a slug-like body with two large tubercles on each end of the body. Saddleback caterpillars are green with brown ends (including the tubercles) and have a brown spot in the center of the body that is ringed with white (it looks similar to a saddle).

Asps are about an inch and a half long when fully grown. They are teardrop-shaped with long, silky hair. Asps are usually tan, but can be a variety of colors.

These caterpillars are typically found on trees and shrubs around homes, and generally do not harm the plants.



Asp or puss caterpillar. Photo by Lacy Hyche.

If stung, pain will immediately be felt and blood-colored spots may form at the site of the sting. Other symptoms that may occur are nausea, headache, vomiting or even respiratory distress. Cover the sting area with tape. Remove tape repeatedly to remove spines from the skin. Applying an ice pack to the sting area may help to soothe the skin. An oral antihistamine may also be taken to relieve itching. If respiratory distress occurs, seek medical attention.

There are many dangerous-looking caterpillars that are safe to handle, but unless you are sure they do not sting, I would advise not to touch!

If the caterpillars need to be managed, try products with active ingredients such as *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*, spinosad, azadirachtin or a pyrethroid.



Buck moth caterpillar. Photo by Gerald Lenhard.



Saddleback caterpillar. Photo by Joe Pase.

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