

Asps

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

Asps are about an inch and a half long when fully grown, teardrop-shaped with long, silky hair. They are usually tan, but can be a variety of colors. Smaller instars are yellow in color while later instars turn pale green to white. The spines containing venom are concealed in later instars by long, soft-looking setae (hairs). Asp caterpillars are typically found on trees and shrubs around homes, and generally do not cause long-term harm to 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 to remove spines from the skin. Repeat tape process as needed to remove all spines. 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.

If you have large populations of these caterpillars and would like to manage them, you can try *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (this targets caterpillars only, but will also kill "good" caterpillars). You may also look for active ingredients such as spinosad or azadirachtin (both naturally-derived products). These products tend to work best on smaller instars. Another option would be a residual pesticide labeled for caterpillars that is okay to use on plants.

For more information contact:

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