Press Release – Box Tree Moth Expanded Quarantine

For Immediate Release

On August 21, 2026, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (Department) and United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) staff confirmed further detection of Box Tree Moth on residential plantings in Commercial Township, Cumberland County, New Jersey. Due to this positive detection, the current Box Tree Moth Quarantine issued for Cape May County has now been expanded to include Cumberland County and Atlantic County which is in close proximity to the surrounding infested counties. This quarantine restricts the movement of any live plants, debris, or dead material of Boxwood (*Buxus spp)* out of Cape May, Cumberland, and Atlantic Counties without a fully executed compliance agreement authorized by the Department.

The Box Tree Moth is a federally regulated pest that primarily feeds on the Boxwood species (Buxus spp.). If left unchecked, it causes significant damage and can potentially kill Boxwood plants. Boxwoods are a popular ornamental evergreen shrub common to many landscape environments in the United States. The nursery and landscape industries that rely on Boxwood plants generate more than $9.8 million in economic activity annually within New Jersey and an estimated $140 million nationally, according to data provided by USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Box Tree Moth is not an unexpected find in New Jersey due to the distance from infestations reported in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York State. Other infestations of this pest have been identified in Michigan, Ohio, and Massachusetts. The Department is currently working closely with the USDA and Rutgers Ag Experiment Extension to map out the infestations in the County.

Properties in Cape May County and Cumberland County have confirmed populations of this invasive insect and control measures have been implemented. This injurious pest is a strong flyer, spreading naturally 3 to 6 miles per year with experts suspecting up to 20 miles. The aggressive, destructive nature of the caterpillar life stage makes it essential to take quick action as soon as damage is detected because defoliation can occur within 10 days.

The caterpillars, which can grow to 1.5 inches, will start out as lime-green, with black stripes, white spots, hair, and a shiny black head. The caterpillars are ravenous feeders and, in heavy infestations, can completely defoliate host plants. After the leaves are gone, they feed on the bark, eventually killing the plant. In addition to damaging foliage, these caterpillars can also create a large amount of webbing on the plant.

The adult Box Tree Moth generally has white wings with a thick brown border. It can be hard to find as it is most active at night. The Box Tree Moth can sometimes be confused with the melonworm moth.

What You Can Do

Affected homeowners can help prevent this invasive pest from spreading throughout the state by monitoring, reporting, and controlling infestations.

- If you have boxwoods in your landscape, monitor them for brown or skeletonized leaves, defoliation, and webbing with caterpillars.
- Contact the New Jersey Department of Agriculture or your county Rutgers Agricultural Cooperative Extension to report a suspected find and learn what pest management tools are available.
- Allow NJDA or Federal agricultural officials to inspect your boxwood plants and place detection traps.
- Remove infested boxwood plant branches. For heavy infestations, cut the boxwood from its base. Your plant should grow back from its roots. All boxwood debris should be double bagged in plastic and placed in the trash. Homeowners should follow the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's recommendations which can be found at: https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/pi/prog/BoxtreeMoth.shtml

Nursery owners, landscapers and Plant Dealers should monitor their boxwoods and implement safeguards to limit pest risk. All nursery businesses should report box tree moth detections to the Department.

Learn more about the box tree moth at:

https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/pi/prog/BoxtreeMoth.shtml

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-pests-diseases/box-tree-moth

Box Tree Moth - Nursery IPM

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