

Armyworm and Cutworm

Armyworms (*Spodoptera*), cutworms, *Heliothis* (bollworms) and loopers are all members of the same moth family, the Noctuidae.

About Armyworms

Armyworms lay their eggs in masses and hatched larvae feed in groups. Older armyworm larvae often have distinct lengthwise stripes, but may vary in color. The surface of the armyworm skin is smooth.

Damage

Armyworms may feed on the crowns of seedlings. On larger plants, armyworm caterpillars skeletonize leaves. In tomatoes, strawberries, and cucurbits they make shallow (occasionally deeper) gouges in fruit.

About cutworms

Cutworms are dull brown caterpillars that curl into a C-shape when disturbed. Normally they are found on or just below the soil surface or on lower parts of plants and are commonly active at night. They have smooth skin with various markings.

Damage

Cutworms attack most garden crops. Early in the season they clip off seedling stems near or just below the soil level. A few species chew holes in leaves or bore into heads of lettuce or cole crops. Later in the season they may chew irregular holes in young fruit or vegetables. Fruit on the ground generally receives the most damage.

Solutions

In general, plant more seeds than needed to allow for some seedling losses.

Destroy Crop Residue

Cutworm problems are generally closely related to presence of plant residues in the field, since this allows them to survive until the next crop grows. Destroy crop residues at least 2 weeks before planting and keep the garden weed-free over winter.

Collar Seedlings

Place a paper or cardboard collar around the base of the seedling stem, pressed into the soil about 2cm. Collars will decompose or may be removed later in the season.

Replant the Affected Area

Cutworms do not spread readily, so destroying and replanting an affected area may be more effective than spraying the entire field.

Natural Predators

Natural predators, such as viruses, parasites, green lacewings, damsel bugs, ground beetles, and spiders, may be effective. Manually remove and destroy insects from the crop to slow reproduction.

Insecticide

Bacillus thuringiensis, Spinosad, or other insecticides may be used against young caterpillars but are needed only when numbers are high; spray near the base of plants, where most feeding occurs.



Armyworm mature larva



Damaged leaf



Cutworm mature larva



Damage to lettuce leaves