

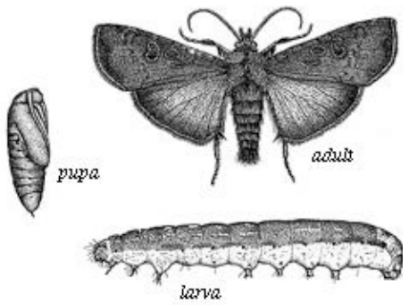


CUTWORMS IN THE HOME GARDEN

Eric Day and Thomas Kuhar, Department of Entomology, Virginia Tech

Description: Many species. Cutworms are dull gray, brown, or black, and may be striped or spotted. They are stout, soft-bodied and smooth, and up to 1 and 1/4 inches long. They curl up tightly when disturbed. Common Host Plant(s): Beans, Beets, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Collards, Cucumbers, Endive, Kale, Lettuce, Lima Beans, Melons, Muskmelons, Onions, Parsley, Parsnips, Peas, Peppers, Potatoes, Radishes, Snap Beans, and Sweet Corn.

Damage: Cut off plants above, at, or below soil surface. Some cutworms feed on leaves, buds, or fruits; others feed on the underground portions of plants. Particularly destructive to early season plantings. Cutworms spend the daylight hours in underground burrows so often the damage is visible, but the cutworms are only found by carefully digging out these burrows.



Life stages of Cutworms



Black cutworm. *W.M. Hantsbarger, Bugwood.org*

Distribution: Throughout Virginia.

Cultural Control: Place a stiff 3-inch cardboard collar around the stems; allow it to extend about 1 inch into the soil and protrude 2 inches above the soil; clear the stem by about 1/2 inch. Till garden so that weedy growth is not present in the spring. With small populations, hand picking at night will provide some control.



Bronzed Cutworm. *David Cappaert, Michigan State University, Bugwood.org*

Organic/Biological Control: *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt is sold under various trade names and formulations) will kill cutworms and is safe. Worms get sick the first day and die later. Some versions are sold as “cutworm baits”.

Chemical Control: If cultural control fails, follow the label instructions and precautions for pre-planting treatment of cutworm. Use a product that is specially labeled for vegetable gardens and follow all precautions on the label.