

Cutworms

Several species (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae)

(Origin: Native or exotic)



Black Cutworm Adult

Primary Host: Many vegetable crops.

Damage: Feed at night and can cut small plants off at the soil surface. On older plants, treatment should not be necessary. Some cutworms climb and feed on all plant parts.

Management: Blacklight or pheromone traps can be used for monitoring. If seedlings are cut off at soil level, cutworms should be suspected.

Biocontrols: Birds, insect predators such as ground beetles, and hymenopteran parasitoids feed on cutworms.

Cultural Controls: Fields with many winter annual weeds should be worked at least 10-14 days before transplanting seedlings. Transplant seedlings when large enough to withstand a little damage.

Physical Controls: Paper collars or other barriers placed around seedlings will protect them from cutworm attack.

Chemical Controls: Contact your local Penn State County Extension Agent for more information. <http://www.extension.psu.edu/extmap.html>

Insect Description:

Adults: Large moths (1½" wingspan). Most cutworm moths are brownish with some wing markings.

Larvae: Smooth skinned, dull brownish caterpillars up to 1½" in length, that curl into a C-shape when disturbed. Normally found on or just below the soil surface or on lower parts of plants. Start feeding in early spring. Eat at night.

Pupae: Found in the soil for most species.

Eggs: Laid mostly on broad-leaved weed stems and leaves.

Life History: Many Overwinter as pupae in the soil or as adult moths. Eggs are deposited early in spring. Several cutworms have more than one generation per year. Larvae hide in the soil during the day and move to the soil surface at night where they cut off plants just above the soil surface, causing the plants to die.



Cutworm Larva showing damage