

Crucifer Pests

Black Cutworm

Agrotis ipsilon

Found worldwide



Damage Symptoms

Plant stem is clipped very near or just below the soil surface. It is common to see several plants in a row either cut off or wilting from damage at their base.



Damage

Insect Characteristics

Chewing mouthparts. The bodies of young caterpillars have a lily texture and are gray to brown to black. They have faint light-colored stripes along their bodies and several black bumps (tubercles) on each segment. Adult moths are gray or brown with irregular spots or bands on their wings. They are active only at night.



Cutworms in the soil

Where to Look

Locate plants that have been recently (the night before) clipped at their bases. At the base of these plants dig around in the soil or plant debris with your fingers to find the black cutworm larvae. They hide there during the day and come out to feed only at night.

Technical Information

Female moths have the potential to lay hundreds of eggs which they deposit on leaves or stems that are close to the soil surface. On some occasions, caterpillars bore directly into the heads of cabbage. They have a habit of curling into a C shape when they are disturbed. This pest attacks seedlings of most crops including bean, pea, tomato, onion, beet, potato, and sweet potato.

Last updated: 2001.

Information from: Field Guide: Insect Pests of Selected Vegetables in Tropical and Subtropical Asia. 1995. B.L. Parker, N.S. Talekar and M. Skinner. Publication 94-427. Pest control recommendations added.