

Imported Cabbageworm

Biology:

The imported cabbageworm is a two generation, or more, per year resident. The overwintering stage is the pupa, attached to plant litter or other structure, but not always the host plant's remains. The adult is the common white butterfly and each female will lay several hundred deep yellow, pinhead-sized eggs on the undersides of cruciferous plants. The eggs hatch in about a week and the larvae grow quickly, reaching an inch in length in about two weeks. The caterpillars are a fairly consistent light green and are velvety in appearance with slow, even crawling. The larvae crawl a short distance from the plant and attach themselves to something before going into the pupal stage, which lasts 1-2 weeks.

When and where to look for them:

The eggs are hard to find, but can usually be found on young crucifers as early as mid-May. These should be picked off as should larvae on young plants before head formation. The adults are present essentially the entire growing season, due to the presence of multiple generations. Because of this, there can be new, highly damaging larvae all year long as well. In the normal Wisconsin year there are just two generations, with highest larval numbers present in June and then again in mid-July through August. The damage done to crucifers' leaves is easy to spot as they chew large, irregular holes through the entire leaf. If left unchecked, damage to all plants in the crucifer family, and some other species, can be very severe. Severe infestations on young plants can prevent heading and cause total yield loss. High populations after head formation will cause stunting, loss in yield and quality, and may allow secondary pathogens to become established and cause even more substantial yield loss.

How to control:

First, be vigilant! The adults are always present from late spring through fall. If you stop tending to your crucifers thinking you've escaped damage, you will likely receive an unpleasant surprise. The best time to control this insect, as with most butterfly and moth pests, is when the larvae are still small. One week after you see eggs, or as soon as you see small larvae or the first sign of damage is the time to treat, especially with young plants. To minimize insecticidal effects on beneficial species, *Bacillus thuringiensis* should be utilized to combat this insect. Use of Bt applications will also successfully protect your crucifers from the cabbage looper and diamondback moth, other major pests of crucifers in Wisconsin. Many other insecticides may also successfully be used against these pests.

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