

**CUTWORMS** **TURNIP MOTH** (*Agrotis segetum*)  
**GREASY CUTWORM** (*Agrotis ipsilon*)



Turnip moth larva in lettuce



Cutworm damage to carrots



Cutworm pupa

Adult of Greasy Cutworm (Dark sword-grass moth) on maize



Cutworm larvae at the base of vegetable plant (fennel)



Cutworm eggs



## Description

There are several species of cutworm. They are the larvae of noctuid moths which fly at night. Cutworms are usually green, brown, or yellow soft-bodied caterpillars, often with longitudinal stripes, up to 2.5cm in length.

The larvae are best known for inhabiting the soil and damaging the base of young plants, often severing them completely at ground level causing plantlets to fall over. Damage is often done at night and the larvae lie concealed curled up under a clod during the day. Most cutworms pass the winter as larvae and start feeding as temperatures rise. The primary hosts are vegetables and roots. Cutworms will work along rows of young carrots and destroy many seedlings. Cutworms also attack wheat, maize, cotton and potatoes.

## Monitoring

You can verify the presence of cutworms by searching just below soil surface debris in concentric circles around several remaining stems. Frequently you will find the C-shaped cutworm. Searches should be made at night with a torch/flashlight and pencil or small stick.

Cutworms are most likely to be a problem on newly cultivated land following crops of alfalfa, small grain crops, and by grassy weeds. However, they also live and feed on weeds around fields and move in to attack new seedlings.

Pheromone traps are available for monitoring moth flights of some *Agrotis spp*

## Control

Wait 2 weeks after cultivating soil before planting vegetable seedlings. Cutworms will have no food and will be attacked by natural enemies.

Commercial baits for cutworm are available from other countries. They usually contain carbaryl insecticide. A home-made bait can be made of Bt (Dipel or similar) mixed with bran or sprayed onto a bait crop of radish. The bait should be distributed around the crop area 2 weeks before planting.

On a small scale, an easy way to prevent cutworms from attacking seedlings is to make protective collars of cardboard and place over tiny seedlings. Press the cardboard collars partially into the soft soil to prevent them from blowing