



Organic Cutworm Control

What Are Cutworms?

- Rarely seen by day, cutworms are grayish to brown smooth-skinned caterpillars that feed above-ground at night.
- Cutworms are the larva of night flying moths, and damage plants by feeding on both roots and foliage.
- Black cutworms have small black dots on their bodies.
- Variegated cutworms are mottled brown with a faint white stripe down their backs.
- Cutworms immediately curl up and become still if you find them while digging.
- Direct-seeded beans and corn are frequent victims, especially when planted into soil recently cleared of weeds and grasses. Young transplants are also frequent victims.

What Cutworm Damage Looks Like

- First thing in the morning, look for seedlings that have been cut off at the soil line during the night. Dig in the soil near by and you may find the cutworm at fault.
- Cutworms wrapping themselves around tender stems as they chew.
- In summer, cutworms can crawl up plants and chew holes in the foliage that looks like damage done by slugs.

Cutworm Life Cycle

- Variegated cutworms overwinter as larvae, which move to the surface to feed in spring. These individuals are the cutworms most likely to decapitate early cabbage seedlings or lettuce sown while the weather is still cool.
- Black cutworms emerge as adults, and promptly begin laying eggs at the bases of weeds and other host plants such as lamb's-quarters and wild mustards. The eggs hatch in less than a week, and the larvae feed on roots and foliage for about a month before they are ready to pupate into adults. By late spring, both types of cutworms are posed to be serious pests in young stands of beans or corn.

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- Cutworm collars made from plastic drinking cups or cardboard tissue rolls help protect young seedlings from cutworm damage.
- Many gardeners also protect seedlings from cutworm damage by placing a nail, toothpick, or bamboo food skewer into the soil alongside the plant stem. Although labor-intensive, this method is practical in small plantings.
- Other gardeners make small moats around plants and fill them with cornmeal. Cutworms eat the cornmeal but cannot digest it, and many die. DE can help too

- New garden areas previously occupied by grass or weeds should be cultivated in fall and again in spring to expose and kill overwintering cutworm larvae and pupae. Chickens let into the plot after these cultivations will help improve the effectiveness of this technique.
- Handpick larvae at night by flashlight