



Leek Moths: a garden pest affecting leeks and garlic

Not native to North America, leek moths are causing increasing problems with all allium crops (onion family). They can feed on many varieties of wild and cultivated onion. Leek moths look like many other small moths may have 2-4 generations per season. They prefer young leaves and avoid leaves older than 2 months. They also prefer flat leaves (ie garlic or leeks) as opposed to leaves of chives or onions. They eat the leaves, can damage bulbs and affect long term storage.

Understanding how to deal with these moths includes understanding their life cycle. Adult leek moths overwinter on leaf debris, and then surface to lay eggs around the base of host plants in spring. When the eggs hatch, the caterpillars feed and grow over a period of about two weeks. They pupate on leaves of alliums or nearby plants inside a loosely woven cocoon. The cocoon is a simple sparse net thrown over the pupating insect, and you can clearly see the developing moth inside. The adult moth emerges in about ten days.

Row covers are effective in controlling this pest. They fly only at night so covers can be removed during the daytime to weed, etc. You can hand pick any cocoons you find, and remove infested plants, do not add to your compost. Be sure to remove dead plant debris at the end of season (removes overwintering areas) and most importantly rotate your crops yearly. Hayes farm is experimenting with a homeopathic treatment for infected plants, previous homeopathic recipes for aphids have been very successful.



Plant Damage



Cocoon



Caterpillar