

BLACK CUTWORM *Lepidoptera: Noctuidae Agrotis ipsilon*

DESCRIPTION

Larvae are about 30 to 40 mm long when mature. They are gray with a lighter brownish colored stripe down the back. The head is dark brown or black. **Adults** are brownish-gray with a spot and a light silvery band on the front wings. The wingspan is about 35 mm. The larva of this cutworm is sometimes called the "greasy cutworm" because it resembles a drop of lubricating grease.



Black cutworm larva

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

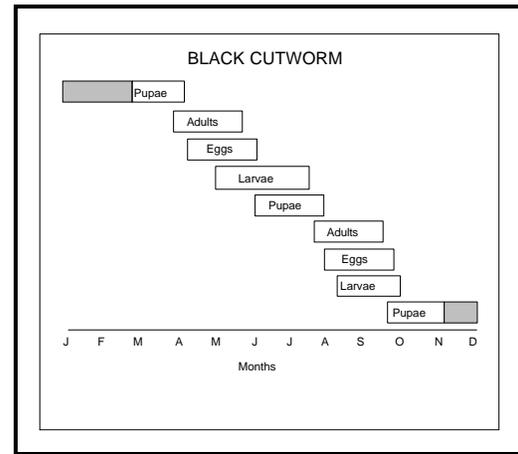
First stage larvae feed briefly on foliage of host plants before moving into the soil to feed on roots and crowns of host plants. They are often called subterranean cutworms because older larvae feed on underground plant parts by day. Second- and third-stage larvae feed at the soil surface mostly at night. Seedling plants such as corn, table beets, and beans are cut off at the soil surface. Damage to older plants causes wilting, or in the case of table beets, larval feeding damage on the roots causes deep scars and reduces yield and quality of the harvested crop.



Black cutworm adult

DISTRIBUTION AND LIFE HISTORY

This species is distributed in many areas of the northwest. Adults are migratory and usually disperse into areas where they are unable to survive the winter, particularly in western Oregon and Washington. Adults emerge in April (this also is the time when adults migrate) and begin laying eggs. The arrival of the first adults may be correlated with spring storms and strong southerly winds. Migration and egg laying continues into June. Eggs are laid on seedling host plants. Eggs hatch in three to seven days and first stage larvae feed on the foliage for a few days before molting and moving down into the soil. Larvae feed beneath the soil surface or at the soil surface for about a month, then pupate. Adults emerge in one to two weeks, mate, and lay eggs for another generation during late August or September. Very few black cutworms survive the winter in western Oregon or Washington, but do survive as pupae east of the Cascade Mountains. There are two overlapping generations each year.



MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

Larvae of the black cutworm can be difficult to control with insecticides because of their subterranean habits. Satisfactory control is less likely as the larvae mature.

Thus, it is important to detect and treat larvae as early as possible. Since adults invade fields in the spring, early monitoring for damage should begin when plants are in the seedling stage. Wilted and cut plants and leaves are visible indicators of feeding injury. Foliar applications of insecticides will reduce the population of young larvae because even early stage larvae that feed near the soil surface will feed on treated foliage at night. As few as two or three cut plants or leaves in 32 m of row (10 feet) at several sites throughout a field may warrant the use of an insecticide. Refer to the Pacific Northwest Insect Control Handbook for a list of registered insecticides on different crops.

[\[Return to Insect Management\]](#) [\[Home\]](#)