

## Guidance note

### Controlling caterpillars



Armyworm



Looper



Bollworm

There are four common species of caterpillar which are pests:

- The **armyworm** (*Spodoptera littoralis*) which has 2 black triangles near the front of the body and 2 at the end. It moves by creeping forward. The army worm is commoner in spring and early summer.
- Two kinds of **looper** (*Trichoplusia ni* and *Ctenoplusia vittata*) which look the same, green with a white line. They move by looping up the body. Loopers are commoner in late summer.
- The **bollworm** (*Helicoverpa zea*) is also green with a white line but moves by creeping forward. The bollworm is the least common of the 4 species.

The signs to look out for and management are the same, so they are treated collectively here.

#### Signs to look out for:

- Holes in leaves and fruit, “windows” in leaves between the veins, dark round droppings on leaves.
- Caterpillars may be on or under leaves, inside fruit or flowers, or lying along a stem. The green ones can be hard to spot.
- “Lacing”: lots of small holes very close together in a leaf so it looks like a piece of lacework. This is caused by the feeding of many young caterpillars just emerged from the egg cluster.

## Affects:

- All crops, flowers, endemic plants.

## Management:

Scout plants regularly, at least once a week and preferably more often, to check for signs of any problems.

When caterpillars are first seen:

- If infestation is localised nip off all the caterpillars seen, both large and small, and either squash or drown them. This is especially useful if you can nip off any leaves showing lacing as soon as they appear as you will remove a large number of caterpillars before they do much damage.
- If infestation is widespread by the time you spot it use a general insecticide such as Garden Ripcord (active ingredient cypermethrin) or Cypermethrin: spray the recommended rate at 7 to 14 day intervals as required; one treatment is usually enough to control an infestation.

Note that use of a chemical insecticide such as Garden Ripcord or Cypermethrin will kill natural enemies and biological control agents.

- The biopesticide, Dipel or “Bt” (active ingredient *Bacillus thuringiensis*), is effective against young caterpillars at an early stage of infestation but not so good with older ones. Dipel doesn't kill natural enemies or biological control agents and is compatible with effective whitefly management, if whitefly are also present.



Armyworm attacking a tomato



This caterpillar has been killed by a natural fungus



Armyworm egg case – the young have just hatched

For further advice please contact Farmer Support at ANRD on 24724.