



## Cutworms



**Figure 1.** A black cutworm (bottom left) has eaten off the base of this corn plant. (University of Georgia Archives, The University of Georgia)



**Figure 2.** Cutworm damage to corn leaves (HGIC, University of Maryland)

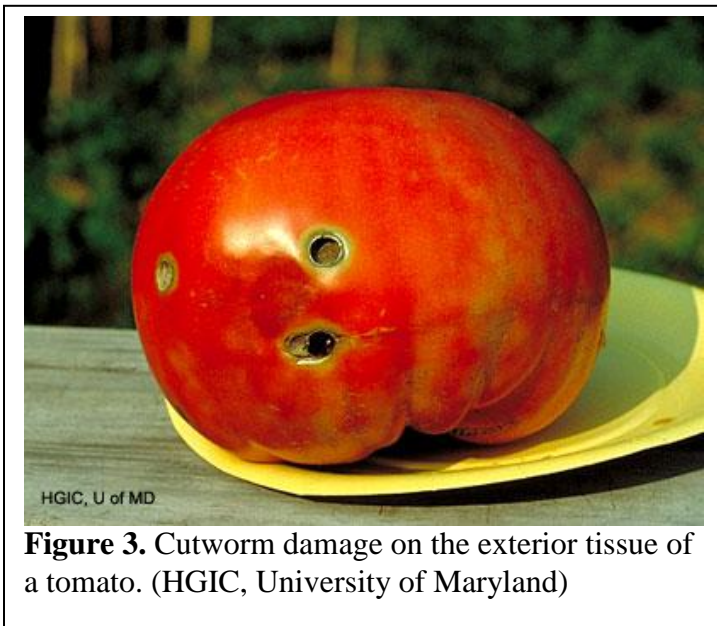
**Description:** Cutworms are the larvae (caterpillars) of night flying moths. The adult moths are nectar feeders or do not feed at all. The damage is caused in the larval stage only.

There are many species of cutworms and each differs somewhat in appearance. Many of the more common species are stout, soft bodied, smooth and cylindrical larvae. The color ranges from brown to gray to black. Cutworms may be either spotted or striped, or may have no particular markings at all. The adult moths are robust, dull-colored moths, sometimes called millers, which fly only at night.

**Damage:** Cutworms feed on a great variety of plants. In the home garden they may cause severe damage in one of the following ways: 1) surface cutworms eat off plants near the soil surface (**Figure 1.**), 2) climbing cutworms climb plants and eat leaves (**Figure 2.**), fruit (**Figure 3.**), etc., 3) army cutworms occur in great numbers and consume nearly all the foliage of the plants, or 4) subterranean cutworms remain in the soil to feed upon roots and underground stems. Cutworms feed at night and hide in the soil or under piles of debris during the day.

**Life History:** Some cutworms overwinter as partly grown larvae, although a few overwinter as pupae. They find shelter in the soil, under clumps of grass, or under piles of debris. In spring as the warm weather arrives, the cutworms begin feeding. In early summer, the mature cutworm hollows out a chamber in the soil and transforms to the pupal or resting stage. For the species that overwinter as pupae,

the adult moths emerge in early spring and the egg laying begins at that time.



**Figure 3.** Cutworm damage on the exterior tissue of a tomato. (HGIC, University of Maryland)

Pupae change to moths and the moths crawl out of the soil. Another generation begins as the females start to lay eggs in the late summer on the stems of plants or the soil surface. One female is capable of laying from a few hundred to 1,500 eggs. Eggs hatch after a few days to two weeks and the larvae feed until cold weather arrives.

**Management:** Cutworms may be discouraged from feeding on garden plants by placing a cardboard collar around the stem extending for some distances above and below the ground level. Eliminate weeds and grasses from your garden as the cutworm moths lay their eggs on such plants.

**Control on tomatoes:** Use permethrin or spinosad. Slug bait of iron phosphate plus spinosad may be used for cutworm control.

*Always check the pesticide label to make sure both*

*the crop and the pest are listed, and to check for the minimum number of days to wait between application and picking the crop (“Days to Harvest”).*

Reprinted from *Cutworms*, prepared by: Carolyn Klass, Senior Extension Associate and Arthur A. Muka, Department of Entomology - Cornell University, 5/75. 1/89 revised.

Pesticide and management recommendations obtained from: *Part I Guide to Pest Management Around the Home, Cultural Methods* and *Part II -- Pest Management Around the Home, 2009-2010 Pesticide Guidelines*, Miscellaneous Bulletins 139S74-I and 139S74II, Cornell Cooperative Extension Publications. Online versions of these publications are available at <http://ipmguidelines.org/Home/>

The Pesticide Management Education Program (PMEP), in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), maintains a web site with a searchable database for pesticide products currently registered in New York State. Homeowners who have Internet access can locate currently registered products at <http://pims.psur.cornell.edu/>. Several different queries are available that will produce a summary for the product(s) that the system locates. If the system fails to locate the product in question, then that product is not currently registered in New York State. The database also provides a summary of important information related to every product currently registered. Two data fields “Status” and “Expiration Date” are provided in each summary. Products with a status of “Registered - Discontinued” are currently registered but will probably be discontinued for use, sale, and distribution in New York State after the date noted in the “Expiration Date” field.

**This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office. Read The Label Before Applying Any Pesticide.**

TK: 10/2009 AW:2/2012