



GARDENING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

University of Illinois Extension: Cook County

Cabbages are prone to three main types of pests: aphids, cabbage loopers and cabbage worms.

Cabbage worms and loopers: Three species of cabbage worms (imported cabbage worms, cabbage loopers and diamond back moth worms) commonly attack the leaves and heads of cabbage and related cole crops. Imported cabbage worms are velvety green caterpillars. The moth is white and commonly is seen during the day hovering over plants in the garden. Cabbage loopers ("measuring worms") are smooth, light green caterpillars. The cabbage looper crawls by doubling up (to form a loop) and then moving the front of its body forward. The moth is brown and is most active at night. Diamondback worms are small, pale, green caterpillars that are pointed on both ends. The moth is gray, with diamond-shaped markings when the wings are closed. The damage caused by diamondback larvae looks like shot holes in the leaf.

The larval or worm stages of these insects cause damage by eating holes in the leaves and cabbage head. The adult moths or butterflies lay their eggs on the leaves but otherwise do not damage the plants. The worms are not easy to see because they are fairly small and blend with the cabbage leaves. Cabbage worms are quite destructive and can ruin the crop if not controlled. They are even worse in fall plantings than in spring gardens, because the population has had several months to increase. About the time of the first frost in the fall, moth and caterpillar numbers finally begin to decline drastically.

What can you do about them? Cabbage loopers can be controlled with a variety of conventional and botanical insecticides. As soon as you note damage you should treat the affected plants with the appropriate insecticides or insecticidal soap, making sure to read and follow label directions carefully. Both conventional and botanical insecticides are toxic to natural enemies as well as to pests. While the worms are still small, they can also be killed off with a biological control. For as long as you can still find cabbage looper worms on your plants, you should repeat the chosen treatment in weekly intervals. However, you need to stop applying insecticide 3 days prior to harvest. Also, post-harvest you will need to remove any leftover or excess plant debris so that hidden pupae may be destroyed.

Natural Enemies: General predators that feed on cabbageworms as well as other pests are ground beetles, true bugs, syrphid fly larvae, spiders, lacewings and spined soldier beetles.

Happy Gardening,

The Chicago Master Gardeners
<http://tinyurl.com/chimastergardeners>