

Is there an Armyworm Threat?

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Is there an Armyworm Threat? There is a lot of news coverage about this now in southern Missouri, Arkansas and some parts of Oklahoma in pastures, lawns and wheat. This pest is the true armyworm, not the same species as the fall armyworm we experienced in lawns and pastures last summer. We don't have a confirmed problem in Kansas yet, but we may see some infestations develop. In Missouri, there have been some reports north of Kansas City, and Ryan Higbee had one report of suspected armyworm infestation in pasture yesterday. When it develops here, it often peaks around Memorial Day. There gobs of moths in some wheat fields (true armyworms and other species) especially in south central Kansas says Bob Bowden. All armyworm larvae exhibit a characteristic striped pattern running the length of their bodies. The head capsule is distinctive. It is light yellowish-brown with a hexagon-like pattern of brownish pigmentation ON the head, making it resemble two large compound eyes. The actual color of the larvae may vary from yellow to green depending on their food source. Larvae hide in debris on the surface of the ground during the day. Adults are moths, active at night currently common (others too) around lights. Remember, a lot of other worms can be confused for true armyworms. For instance in examining larvae, look also for 5 or 6 yellowish to white dots down the center of the backline, if present, these are likely variegated cutworms, not armyworms. VARIEGATED CUTWORMS are climbing larvae that feed on foliage similar to armyworms. These are usually mostly found in alfalfa stubble following the first cutting, but are now causing problems in no-till milo and soybean fields. Blackish worms with a yellowish stripe on each side of the body and usually a single black spot located on each side of the body on the 4th body segment (counting from the head) indicates yellow striped armyworm (found in southeast, and by Ray Ladd on corn in Atchison County).

Chris Baker says that black cutworms have been damaging no-till soybeans in Cowley County. They can also damage sorghum and corn, and sunflowers. These worms are usually grayish to blackish in color and usually hide under the soil surface or under debris on the surface. Often there is a faint rather indistinct narrow stripe down the midline of the back, but a good feature is the presence of about 3 small, shiny black dots on each body segment. Under magnification, the skin texture is composed of small shiny granules.

In the southwest, Phil Sloderbeck is reporting beet armyworm problems in corn. This species usually found on alfalfa, is not documented east of the Dodge City area, if suspected please collect samples of larvae for verification, preserved in alcohol (it is particularly difficult to control). Armyworms can be a

threat to wheat. Control may be advised where populations average more than 4 to 5 per foot of row before they have destroyed the flag leaf; however, they are not usually detected until they have stripped all of the leaves and are feeding on the beards in the heads at a time when it may be too late for treatment to be of economic value.

On wheat use methyl parathion, Lannate, Sevin, Warrior, or Tracer and follow label directions and pay particular attention to preharvest waiting intervals. True armyworms are damaging pastures in southern areas. They prefer fields with dense luxurious growth (in fertility plots they have been known to attack only those with the highest N levels). Control in pastures is generally suggested where numbers average about 4 to 5 half-grown healthy worms per square foot. In practice, when damage is severe enough that it is noticed by most people, worms may be nearly ready to stop feeding. They rarely recycle. Time of development from hatching to larval maturity is usually around 14 to 15 days at this time of year. Larvae will be an inch and a quarter to one and a half inches in length at maturity. Masses of white cottony cocoons (that look like eggs) on the ground indicate a good parasite population. We are limited in products labeled for pastures and grazing. Insecticides include the Sevin products (a variety of products and formulations, some include pastures other don't) with a 14 day waiting interval; Lannate has a limited label; Malathion at 1.25 # of a.i./acre and 0 waiting interval; and various B.t. Products (Dipel, Lepinox, etc.) (0 days) which are safe, but slower acting. Armyworms may infest lawn grasses. True armyworms mostly limit their attack to plants in the grass family.

It is more likely for reports of armyworms in gardens and flowers to actually be variegated cutworms. Where variegated cutworms are present concentrate the attack on treating not only the damaged plants, but also treat the soil surface around the plants where worms hide during the day. In general sprays or dusts labeled for ornamental uses with claims for worm control will likely be useful. Examples include products containing carbaryl (Sevin), malathion, Orthene, and Dursban or Diazinon where still available.

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