

Squash Vine Borers

by Bob Bauernfeind

As pumpkin plant vines spread, and small pumpkins are set and growing, gardeners and young children think forward to harvesting pumpkins for decorations and jack-o-lanterns at Halloween and Thanksgiving. However, they become dismayed when plants begin to look limp/flaccid. Several potential problems could be at work. One of the common causes of “flagging” plants is squash vine borers.

The presence of squash borers can be confirmed by tracing backwards along the vine to the main stalk of the pumpkin plant. Examine the stem and base of the plant. If one sees wet frassy exudates being pushed, (Figure 3), the squash vine borer is certain to be present. By slitting the “affected area”, the squash vine borer larva can be seen (Figure 4). Squash vine borers are the larvae of the colorful clear-winged squash vine borer moth (Figure 5).



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Moths appear earlier in the growing season, primarily depositing eggs at the base of the pumpkin plants, and anywhere along the vine. The larvae bore into the stems where they feed away undetected until such time that they have grown to the extent that their feeding activities have disrupted the flow of vascular liquids, thus explaining the wilt symptoms.

At this point in time, little can be done to reverse the damage. The larvae within the stems/vines are protected from insecticides applied to the outer surface areas. However, some people will slice open the stems/vines and physically remove the larvae. The slit can then be squeezed together/closed. Dirt can be mounded over the “surgical area” and kept moist. If the internal damage was not too severe, the plant may produce supplementary runners and/or new root growth, thus allowing plants to recover and pumpkin development to proceed.

Additional information can be found at: [Squash Bugs and Squash Vine Borers](#), MF2508

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