Kansas Insect Newsletter

For Agribusinesses, Applicators, Consultants and Extension Personnel

Department of Entomology
123 West Waters Hall
K-State Research and Extension
Manhattan, Kansas 66506
785-532-5891
http://www.entomology.ksu.edu/extension

May 4, 2012 No. 8

What Are All Those Moths Flying Around?

We have received many inquiries regarding an abundance of moths flying around the state. These are known as "Miller moths," which are the adult stage of the army cutworm (*Eudora auxiliaries*). "Miller moths" migrate across Kansas in the spring on their way to Colorado. They get there name from the fine scales that rub off the wing covers, which remind people of the dusty flour that covered the clothing of individuals that worked in grain mills. The reason why they are so abundant this time of year may be due to the environmental conditions (temperature and moisture) we have experienced this year. In addition, many plants are in flower, which tends to attract the adults. The moths are similar in size to many other cutworm moths found throughout the state with a wing-span of 1.0 to 1-1/2 inches. They are gray to light-brown in color with wavy dark and light markings on the forewings. In addition, they have a distinctive kidney-shaped pattern on the forewing. Adults feed on the pollen and nectar of flowering plants in landscapes and gardens. Eggs are laid by female moths in late summer and late fall in wheat and/or alfalfa fields that have abundant weed populations. Eggs hatch into young caterpillars, and if caterpillar populations are abundant, they may cause significant damage to alfalfa, winter wheat, and plants in landscapes or gardens. Once they become full-grown in mid to late spring they burrow into the soil and pupate. The army cutworm overwinters as a late-instars caterpillar. When adults emerge, they migrate and seek higher elevations where they spend several months feeding on nectar and resting in sheltered areas. Eventually, they return to lower elevations and the female moths lay eggs.

Peak moth activity may last five to six weeks. When there are abundant populations of army cutworms this usually results in large flights of "Miller moths." "Miller moths" tend to avoid daylight and hide before day break in dark, tight locations such as small cracks in doorways and garage doors, and even cars are acceptable hiding places. In fact, they can be found in very obscure locations such as between the coils of garden hoses.

"Miller moths" are susceptible to a number of predators, especially birds such as swallows and sparrows that devour the moths. The caterpillars are susceptible to attack from ground beetles. The adults are primarily a nuisance and are attracted to lights, so reducing outdoor lighting at night will avoid attracting "Miller moths" to homes. Once inside the house, you can capture them and either release outside or kill them. One potential problem is that if large numbers of moths die inside a home there may a noticeable odor and these old dead moths may serve as a food source for carpet beetles and rodents (rats or mice).

If you have any questions regarding "Miller moths" you can contact your county or state extension specialist.

Raymond Cloyd

Bean Leaf Beetles

In a recent visit to the Manhattan Community Garden, one of the gardeners reported that cutworms were destroying his newly emerged bean plants (Figure 1).

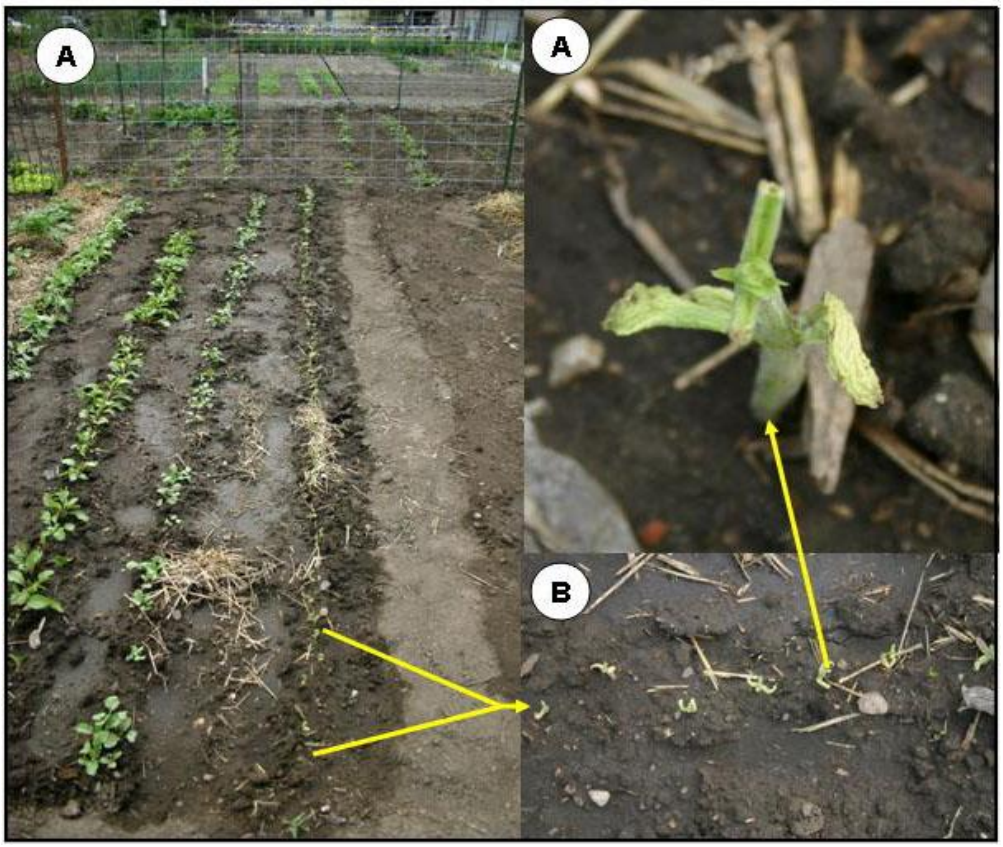

Figure 1

This did not appear to be typical cutworm damage (plant stems cut at the soil surface). And looking up to the far end of the row, it became apparent as to the real culprits. The holes (Figure 2) in the leaves were indicative of bean leaf beetle feeding damage.

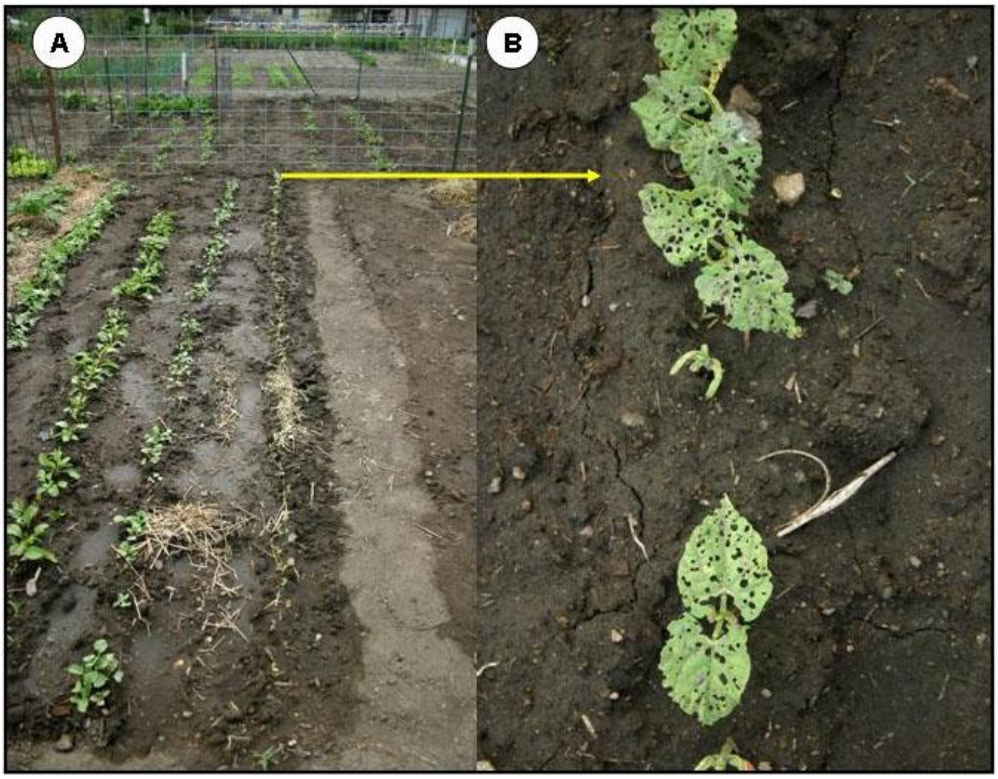

Figure 2

When tending gardens, bean leaf beetles are overlooked due to their preference to feed on undersides of leaves (shielding them from view) as well as their small size (5 mm in length). They are rather attractive reddish to yellowish colored beetles with black markings (Figure 3).

Figure 3

While an individual or several bean leaf beetles might be tolerated, the usual situation is that they occur in high numbers. Thus their cumulative feeding damage results in the previously mentioned/pictured damage.

Countering bean leaf beetles requires gardeners to be vigilant. Every couple of days, inspect plants for beginning signs of feeding damage (a few holes here and there). When damage appears to be on-the-increase, then apply an insecticide treatment, making sure to achieve thorough coverage (remembering that the beetles are secretive and feed on undersides of leaves). Because beetles are strong fliers and may continually move into garden plantings, it may be necessary to treat several times during the bean production season. I would recommend investing in a sprayer to apply liquid insecticide treatments, versus dust applications out of a shaker container. Too often, dusts are improperly applied and over-used (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Bagworms Are Active ----- But No Rush to Spray

Traditionally, mid-May is cited as the beginning of seasonal bagworm activities when larvae emerge from their overwintering quarters (last year's female bags). I have been periodically observing a red cedar tree line to record the onset/appearance of this year's brood in the Manhattan area. On April 18, I was able to find a single bagworm after 15-20 minutes of looking. On April 25, small bagworms could be found on several trees. Earlier today (May 2), bagworms could be found on most trees. Patience is required when inspecting for bagworms as they currently are quite small (commonly, 3 ½ mm – Figure 5). But once a person initially sees/identifies a small bagworm, they seem to stand out and be easily recognized. Based on these observations, we are perhaps 2-3 weeks ahead of normal.

Figure 5

Despite their presence, now **IS NOT** the time to spray for bagworms. The reason for not rushing out to spray is that bagworms have an extended hatching period (4-5 weeks). To spray now would merely control/kill the early emerging larvae which (due to their small size) cause negligible feeding damage. People who spray now, then, may (in their minds) say, "Well, I sprayed and took care of my bagworms!", failing to realize that the remaining hatchlings (if left untreated) will thrive/size-up/cause eventual damage.

Key to successful control of bagworms is the timing of spray treatments. The usual recommendation is (in normal years) to apply insecticides towards the end of June to the first week of July ------ a time when ALL EGGS WILL HAVE HATCHED, BUT EVEN THE EARLIEST HATCHLINGS/BAGWORMS STILL OF INSUFFICIENT SIZE TO HAVE CAUSED NOTICIBLE/IRREPARABLE DAMAGE.

Given this year's early appearance of bagworms, the abovementioned "standard time frame" needs to be appropriately adjusted/made earlier by 2-3 weeks. But the final timing decision needs to be determined through monitoring of bagworm numbers and visual inspections of feeding damage. This will vary from location to location (in Kansas) and site to site within locations.

Bob Bauernfeind

Sincerely,

Robert J. Bauernfeind
Extension Specialist
Horticultural Entomology
phone: 785/532-4752
e-mail: rbauernf@ksu.edu

Raymond A. Cloyd
Extension Specialist
Ornamental Entomology/Integrated Pest Management
Phone: 785-532-4750
Fax: 785-532-6232
e-mail: rcloyd@ksu.edu