

# Healthy Choices to Control Lawn and Garden Pests

## CUTWORMS

### What Do They Look Like?

- Cutworms come in a variety of species and colours
- They may be dull gray, brown or black with stripes or spots
- They are greasy-looking, fat, hairless caterpillars, up to 5 cm long. They tend to curl up when disturbed

### Where Do I Find Them?

- Cutworms live in the soil and on host plants such as tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, peas, beans, squash, corn, lettuce, cabbage, rhubarb and other common vegetable and plant species
- Cutworms hide in the soil near the base of plant stems during the day
- You can easily find cutworms at night by searching with a flashlight near plant stems and the top layer of soil

### Cutworm Life Cycle

- Cutworms are the larvae of various moth species
- Eggs are laid in soil under weeds and debris or on tips of grass during late summer
- Larvae hatch in spring and cause the greatest damage between early May and late June, before becoming adult moths

### What Does The Damage Look Like?

- Cutworms chew through the stems of plants at or just below the soil surface
- Many plants in a row may be “cut off” during the night and will appear “freshly mowed”



- Some cutworm species climb and chew on the leaves of plants

### Are Cutworms Really A Problem?

- These pests cut off plants above, at, or below soil surface. Planting extra seeds or seedlings can offset cutworm damage
- Some cutworms feed on leaves, buds, seedlings or fruits; others feed on the underground portions of plants. Leaf damage is usually not a serious problem

### What Can I Do? Non-Pesticide Treatments

- Handpick cutworms from plants and squash them or drown them in a bucket of soapy water
- Make stiff plastic, cardboard or metal “collars” or “shields” to place around plants. Leave a gap of approximately 1 cm around stem and make sure the collar extends 2.5 cm below to 5 cm above the soil surface. Try using plastic drink or milk bottles, toilet paper rolls or soft drink cans
- Pour molasses or other sticky substances around plant bases. Individuals become trapped and die. Left over molasses is washed away by rain

- Sprinkle crushed eggshells around plant bases. When cutworms crawl on the shells, they dehydrate and die
- Special microscopic worms called nematodes may be purchased at garden centres. They kill cutworms by acting as parasites. Talk to a garden professional before purchasing or using this control method

## How Can I Prevent It Next Year?

- Mow grass twice a week in the spring to remove cutworm eggs. Optimal grass length is between 6 and 8 cm. Longer grass generally means a healthier, more pest-resistant lawn
- Turn soil several weeks before planting to allow birds to feed on cutworms. Plant as late in the season as possible and sow extra seeds
- Discourage moths from laying eggs in August and September by removing plant debris and weeds from your garden. Apply mulches in fall after adult moths have stopped laying eggs

## Tips For A Healthy Garden

- Ensure soil is healthy, well conditioned with organic compost and has adequate drainage (remember that plants get most of their nutrients from the soil)
- Plan your garden so plants are put in areas where they naturally thrive (dry or wet, sun or shade)
- Plant in raised beds (good for the plants, good for the back)
- Use native plants that are already acclimatized, require low maintenance and have an in-bred resistance to local pests and diseases
- Water deeply but infrequently to maintain a strong root structure
- Protect and attract native beneficial species (give them a place to live and a source of water and they'll do the rest)
- Practise annual crop rotation for each type of vegetable (keeps patterns of disease or insect invasion in check)
- Fertilize regularly in spring and fall with organic compost

