

Caterpillars (a.k.a. "Worms"): Loopers

See also: <http://www.potatoes.com/research.cfm>



Photo: Dax Dugaw



Larva and adult of cabbage looper (*Trichoplusia ni*). This is the only looper species of concern in Washington potatoes. Entomologists spread and dry moths in this position to aid identification. In life the moth rests like the cutworms & armyworms on the other side of this card.

Loopers are close relatives of cutworms and armyworms (see reverse), but are easily recognized by having only 3 pairs of posterior prolegs, & they walk in an inch-worm fashion.



The pupal stage of loopers, cutworms, and armyworms look alike.



Photo: Dax Dugaw

Other loopers are sometimes found in potato fields, but research shows that they cannot develop well on potatoes and are not pests.

Celery looper (*Autographa falcifera*).

Looper pest status and biology

1. There are many species of loopers, but recent research shows that only cabbage looper is a pest of potatoes in Washington.
2. Cabbage looper larvae develop very quickly on potatoes -- in as few as 8 days. This means there can be several generations per year.
3. Scouting for loopers is important. Be sure loopers are still present before treating -- oftentimes damage is not noticed until larvae are fully developed.
4. Like other caterpillars, large larvae are the most difficult to control with insecticides.

Washington State Potato Commission (Phone: 509-765-8845)

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Photo: Dax Dugaw



Photo: Dax Dugaw



Photo: Dick Wilson

Larva and adult of
bertha armyworm
(*Mamestra configurata*).

Larvae and adult of western
yellow-striped armyworm
(*Spodoptera praefica*).
Armyworms and cutworms
often curl up when disturbed.



Photo: John Davis



Photo: Dax Dugaw



Photo: John Davis

Spotted cutworm (*Xestia
c-nigrum*) larva and adult.

Armyworm and cutworm pest status and biology

1. Recent research has shown spotted cutworm, bertha armyworm and cabbage looper (see reverse) to be the most important caterpillar defoliators in WA potatoes.
2. The pupal stage of some moths occurs in the soil (see reverse for a photo).
3. These caterpillars can be difficult to find since they are often most active at night. Look in the soil or under debris in the field.
4. Many species of moths lay eggs on potato plants -- sometimes singly and sometimes in large batches.

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