Insect pest - the cabbage moth

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THE CABBAGE MOTH

(Plutella maculipennis Curt.)

The cabbage moth, sometimes known as the diamond-back cabbage moth because of its markings, is well known to all cabbage and cauliflower growers. It may also infest other members of the cabbage family, such as turnips, brussels sprouts, stocks, etc.

The moth is an insignificant creature, measuring a little over half an inch across the expanded wings, greyish brown in colour, with some lighter markings showing on the back when the wings are closed. Patches may be eaten away, leaving only the thin transparent upper leaf surface intact. This film is, of course, easily broken and a ragged hole is left as a result of the injury.

The full-grown caterpillars measure about ½ in. in length, are bright green in colour and show great activity if disturbed. When touched they will wriggle and squirm violently and often fall to the ground or let themselves drop from the leaf suspended by a silken thread.

The greenish yellow eggs just visible to the naked eye are laid singly on the leaves, and soon hatch into tiny caterpillars.

With cabbages, it is the outer leaves of the young plants which are first attacked, but as the heart commences to develop, the more tender leaves receive attention, and in the case of severe infestations the plants may be so badly riddled as to be rendered useless. When fully matured the caterpillars spin thin white silken cocoons, within which they pupate and remain attached to the under-surface of the leaf.

At first the young caterpillars burrow into the leaf and form tunnels in the plant tissue, but after a time they emerge from their burrows and commence feeding on the lower leaf surface. Often large
DDT dusts or 0.1% DDT sprays give satisfactory results. Where aphides as well as caterpillars are attacking vegetables, a combined dust containing DDT and BHC ("Gammexane" or Benzenehexachloride) is often favoured.

If arsenate of lead is preferred for any reason by a grower a dust consisting of equal parts of arsenate of lead and slaked lime is recommended. When arsenate of lead sprays are used, the mixture should be applied at the rate of ½ oz. of powdered arsenate of lead or 1 oz. of paste to 1 gallon of water. The mixture must be kept thoroughly agitated while in use, as the arsenate of lead is not soluble and will gradually settle to the bottom. The addition of a proprietary spreader, or 1 oz. of flour mixed to a paste, to every gallon of spray will increase its sticking properties.

LIFE CYCLE

The time required for this pest to develop from egg to adult varies considerably with the weather conditions. The eggs may take from a few days to over a week to hatch, while the caterpillars may take anything from ten days to a month to pupate. The pupal stage ranges from a little under a week to a fortnight or more. From this it will be seen that under favourable conditions a generation of the cabbage moth could develop about every month.

CONTROL

A careful watch should be kept for the first signs of cabbage moth injury so that early action can be taken against the pest. Seed-beds and young plants should receive routine treatments to prevent any infestation becoming firmly established. DDT dusts and sprays have now largely supplanted arsenate of lead as a control for many caterpillar pests and 2%
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Treatments should be repeated about every ten days or a fortnight according to the severity of the infestation. But it cannot be too strongly emphasised that one treatment given to check an incipient outbreak is worth half a dozen given after the pest has gained a firm hold.

Cold, wet weather during the winter definitely retards the pest, but long dry periods during this season of the year should be a sign to the gardener to be on the watch.

**WARNING**

Dangerous insecticides such as DDT and arsenate of lead should not be applied to vegetables within six weeks of cutting. If thorough treatments are given in the early stages, it is often possible to so reduce the pest that the mature vegetables can be protected by other measures. Where later treatments are necessary, derris compounds should be used as these will not leave dangerous residues.

**BIOLOGICAL CONTROL**

Several species of wasps, some especially introduced for the purpose, are known to parasitise caterpillars of the cabbage moth and at times large numbers are killed by these natural enemies. At the present stage, however, their efficiency is not such that growers could safely neglect normal insecticidal treatments.

**CULTURAL METHODS OF CONTROL**

All old infested plants should be destroyed and as far as possible seedlings should not be planted close to areas previously laid down to closely related crops.

When cutting cabbages, etc., the whole plant should be pulled up so that the butt is not left to act as a harbour for pests.

The destruction of weeds of all kinds should be carried out as a routine practice, no matter what pests it is desired to control.

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