



Corn Earworm

Overview

Corn earworm (*Helicoverpa zea Boddie*) is a common pest in corn. Once corn earworm larvae enter an ear and begin to feed, there is no effective control, so timely insecticide application requires protective coverage of the ear zone. That way, when eggs hatch, young larvae will immediately encounter a lethal dose of insecticide.

What you should know

- Corn earworms come in many colors – light green, tan, brown, pink, maroon or nearly black – with light and dark stripes and a light brown head. Larvae grow to be nearly 1 ½ inches long.
- Corn earworm moths are buff-colored with irregular spots and markings on their wings.
- Corn earworm moths prefer to lay their eggs in corn silk – each egg is only half the size of a pinhead.
- Eggs hatch in 2-5 days, depending on temperature. Shortly after hatching, young larvae follow the silk to the tip of the developing ear. Once inside, they feed on the kernels.

Action steps

1. **Scout fields:** Use pheromone traps to monitor for the presence of corn earworm moths, beginning just before corn begins to tassel.
2. **Control earworm with timely insecticide applications:** Apply an appropriate insecticide once 30–50% of ears are showing silk development. Subsequent applications should be made every 2–5 days if there is still moth activity.
3. **Choose the right hybrid:** Select a hybrid that performs well in your area and has traited protection against corn earworm. Remember that *Bt* varieties require non-*Bt* refuges. Refer to the product label for specific requirements.

<https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-31/E-31.html>



Corn earworms come in many colors – light green, tan, brown, pink, maroon or nearly black – with light and dark stripes and a light brown head.



30-Second Summary

- Corn earworm is a common problem.
- Timely insecticide application can be effective to eliminate earworm larvae shortly after hatching.
- Once corn earworm larvae enter the ear and begin feeding on the kernels, little can be done to control them.

NOTES:

For more information, contact:



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