

VARIEGATED CUTWORM *Lepidoptera: Noctuidae Peridroma saucia*

DESCRIPTION

Mature **larvae** are 40 to 50 mm long and range in color from pale gray to dull brown. The body is mottled and streaked with dark brown or black and marked along the side with a yellow band. There is a black "W" shaped mark on the dorsum of the last abdominal segment, and yellow spots on the dorsum of segments four to seven. **Adults** have a wingspan of about 45 mm and vary in color from brown to reddish-brown with darker spots on the forewings.



Variegated Cutworm Adult



Variegated Cutworm Larva

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

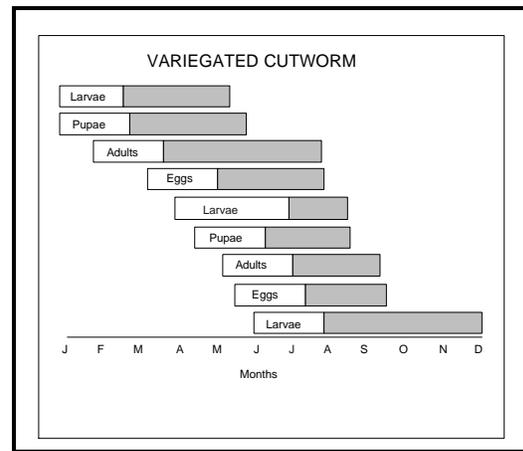
This cutworm does not occur in damaging numbers every season, but is probably the most destructive species when the population is high. Larvae feed on foliage of alfalfa, clover, sugarbeets, mint, and vegetable crops such as beans, beets, spinach, lettuce, and peas. Heavy infestations may cause complete defoliation of plants. In many crops, the treatment threshold ranges from an average of 2 to 3 larvae per sweep sample.

DISTRIBUTION AND LIFE HISTORY

This cutworm is distributed throughout North America. Variegated cutworm overwinters in the soil or under trash as a partially mature larva. Larvae begin feeding in early spring and may do damage to seedlings. Larvae mature in late April and May and pupate in earthen cells in the soil. Adults emerge in late May and June and begin laying eggs in clusters of 200 to 500 on the undersides of leaves. Eggs hatch in four to seven days and larvae begin feeding on plant foliage. Larvae feed for four to six weeks, then pupate in the soil. Adults emerge in late August and lay eggs that hatch into larvae that form the overwintering stage. There are two generations each year in the northwest.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

Cutworms are easiest to control when they are small. Fields should be checked regularly to detect the presence of small larvae so that applications of insecticides can be properly timed. Small larvae can be sampled with a sweep net and older larvae can be sampled by examining the soil surface under



trash. Take at least 10 sweep samples from several different representative locations in the field. Larvae feed at night and hide during the day, so sampling should be done early in the morning. For soil surface samples, take a sample every five acres for fields up to 30 acres. Add an additional sample site for every 10 acres in fields that exceed 30 acres. Look very closely for small and curled-up larvae under and in folded leaves on the ground. Several species of parasitoids attack larvae, such as *Meteorus* spp. and *Campoletis* spp. If larvae are parasitized, the treatment threshold may be increased. Insecticides may be necessary to control infestations, but they must be used carefully to protect natural enemies and pollinators.

[\[Return to Insect Management\]](#) [\[Home\]](#)