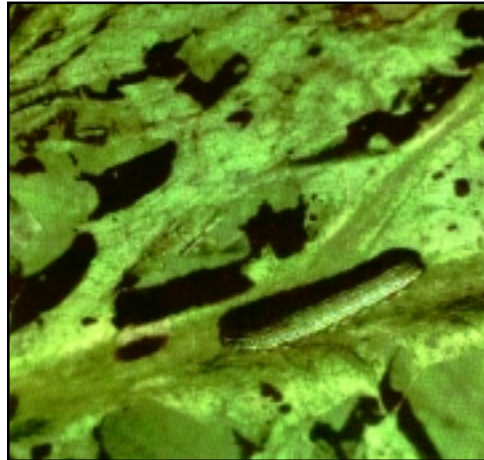


Cluster Caterpillar (*Spodoptera litura* [Fabricius])

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The moth of this species is widespread throughout Asia and is present in the Marianas, most of the Carolines, and the South Pacific region including American Samoa. Many vegetables and other crops are damaged by cluster caterpillars. Crops likely to be seriously damaged in this region include the various taros, cabbage and its relatives, and tomatoes.



Large caterpillar on cabbage leaf



Cluster of small caterpillars on taro leaf

The eggs of the cluster caterpillar (*Spodoptera litura* [Fabricius]) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae) are laid in clusters of 200 to 300 underneath leaves and covered with brown scales from the body of the mother. They hatch in three to four days. The larvae feed in a group when they are young but spread out as they get older. When they are mature they leave the plants and pupate in a small cell in the soil. The life cycle takes about 25 days. The adult moths are nocturnal and are not often seen. The larvae are primarily leaf feeders but may occasionally cut young plants at the soil line. They may also feed on the green fruit of tomatoes. Unlike tomato fruitworms, they generally do not bore into the fruit.

Control

The occurrence of this pest is sporadic and difficult to predict. In Guam and American Samoa, several parasites have been imported which attack the eggs of the cluster caterpillar. In the home garden, it is generally possible to simply remove all the caterpillars in a cluster before much damage to the plant has

occurred. Several insecticides may also be used if necessary. When the use of chemicals is required, consult an Extension Agent at your local land grant institution. In Guam, you may also consult the Fruit and Vegetable Pesticide Guide for current recommendations and permissible uses.



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