

# Bad Bug: Cabbage Worm

## Description

Light green with a faint yellow stripe down their side, they measure about 1" long and have fine velvety hairs on their surface. The adult butterflies have a 1-2" wingspan and are whitish-yellow with black splotches on their wings.

## Life Cycle

The cabbage worm is the larvae. After 2 to 3 weeks of feeding, larvae pupate attached by a few strands of silk to stems or other nearby objects. The adult is a butterfly. The whitish, rocket-shaped eggs are laid singly on the undersides of leaves. They spend the winter underground as a chrysalis.

## Plants They Attack

They enjoy all members of the Brassica family, including: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, radish, and turnip.

## Spot the Damage

They chew ragged holes in leaves. They may also attack flower clusters of broccoli and cauliflower, leaving round holes scattered throughout. Small cabbage worms are often difficult to spot, so check the undersides of leaves and along the leaf veins. Their presence is often noted by the dark pellets of excrement they leave behind.

## Preventative Actions

Turn over the garden soil in the fall, exposing any chrysalises to winter freezes and predators.

Choose cabbage varieties with tighter heads as they are less susceptible to damage.

Cover susceptible plants with floating row cover, making sure to seal the edges with dirt so pests can not get in.

Hand-pick worms off the plants, placing them into soapy water.

Sprinkle plants with corn meal or rye flour. The worms will eat it, bloat, and die.

Soak Brassica crops in warm salt water before cooking to prevent consuming any of the bugs.

Attract native predators by planting pollen and nectar plants such as yarrow or herbs which will flower like thyme, cilantro, dill, lavender, hyssop, chamomile etc. Tachnid flies and parasitic wasps prey on soft-bodied larvae like cabbage worms.

## Organic Product Controls

Use BT, botanical oils, citrus oils, pyrethrins. (caution: pyrethrins are a broad-spectrum insecticide and will kill all insects).

### Sources quoted:

- 'Good Bug Bad Bug' Walliser, 2008
- 'The Organic Gardener's Handbook,' Ellis and Bradley, 1996
- Cedar Circle Farm: <https://cedarcirclefarm.org/tips/category/pests>



**Cabbage Worm**

photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, bugwood.org



**Eggs of the Cabbage Worm**

photo: blog.ecosmart.com



**Cabbage Worm Butterfly**

photo: www.toxicfreenc.org/



**Predator: Tachnid fly parasitizing hornworm**

photo: JohnAWeidhass, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University bugwood.org