



Pest e-alerts



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Start Looking For Army Cutworms in Alfalfa, Canola, and Wheat

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This is the time of year when army cutworm activity will become visible. Glenn Detweiler, Extension Educator for Washita County (SW Oklahoma) sent in some digital photos of army cutworms to the Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Lab that were collected from a canola field in Washita County. Army cutworms can cause severe stand loss in canola and winter wheat if numbers exceed thresholds and are not controlled. More information can be found by consulting [EPP-7089, Caterpillars in Canola](#).

Army cutworms grow slowly during the winter and don't cause noticeable damage until temperatures warm in the spring. In alfalfa, signs of injury include slow production of new growth and stand loss (Figure 1). They can be particularly damaging to newly planted stands, causing severe stand loss. Injury in alfalfa is often associated with fields lacking significant amounts of stubble. If alfalfa or wheat has been grazed, army cutworms will often hide under cow pats during the day and feed on the crop at night.



Fig 1. Army cutworm damage in alfalfa. (Photo courtesy KSU.)

In canola, they can cut out stand as they feed, killing the canola growing point. Signs of injury include plants that are wilted with visible chewing damage at the base of the stem (Figure 2). In wheat, signs of injury include: areas of a field where the wheat seems to be “slow growing” or fails to green up, followed later by patches of stand loss later in the spring (Figure 3). Because the cutworms like to hide below the soil surface during the day, they won’t be found unless they are physically brought up from their sleeping chambers by stirring up the soil.



Fig 2. Army cutworm damage in canola. Yellow arrow shows typical damage to crown (Photo by T. Royer)



Fig 3. Typical damage caused by cutworms in wheat. (Photo courtesy of the University of Nebraska).

Fields should be sampled by disturbing or digging 3-row-feet of soil to a depth of two inches at 5 or more locations. If cow pats are present in the sample site, be sure to turn them over (only the dry ones)! The cutworms will be “greenish grey” with a lighter stripe along the center of their back, and will probably curl up into a tight “C” when disturbed (Figure 4).

The suggested treatment threshold for alfalfa is 3-4 larvae per square foot if the larvae are less than 0.5 inch, and 2-3 larvae per square foot when they are over 0.5 inch long. The suggested treatment threshold for cutworms in canola is 1-2 per row-foot. The suggested treatment threshold for army cutworms in wheat is 2-3 cutworms per linear foot of row.

Current recommendations for control of army cutworms in canola are listed in page 153 of E-832, 2011 OSU Extension Agents’ Handbook of Insect, Plant Disease, and Weed Control. [CR-7667, Management of Insect and Mite Pests in Canola](#) and [CR-7194, Management of Insect and Mite Pests in Small Grains](#).



Fig 4. Army cutworm larva. (Photo courtesy Frank Peairs, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org).

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