

# Groundnut Caterpillar

## Recognize the problem

The groundnut caterpillar, *Spodoptera litura*, appears on groundnut both in vegetative phase and at the time of pod formation. It feeds initially by skeletonizing, leaving only the outline of the leaves and veins on the plant. As growth continues, caterpillars eat the entire leaves. After December, particularly after heavy rains, the infestation increases.

## Background

The adult female moth lays eggs in masses of 200-300 on the underside of the groundnut leaves. The egg masses are approximately 4-7 mm in diameter, brown in colour and are covered with body hair. Eggs usually hatch after 3-4 days. Fully grown caterpillars measure about 3-5 cm in length. They feed gregariously by scrapping the chlorophyll. Sometimes the feeding is so heavy that only the petiole (the stalk that attaches the leaf to the stem) and branches are left behind. The old larvae are nocturnal and can be found on the soil around the base of the plant during the day time. When the population is high, the larvae migrate from one field to another in search of food.

## Management

- Deep summer ploughing will expose the hidden pupae to direct sunlight which can kill them
- Irrigating the field will avoid prolonged mid-season drought
- Plant castor or sunflower as trap crop
- Install pheromone traps @ 12 per acre
- Install 5 bird perches per acre
- Spread a blue cloth in the field during the evening to attract the larvae and then destroy them
- Spray NPV (Nuclear Polyhedrosis Virus) at 250 LE per hectare
- Place poison baits in the field to attract and be eaten by the caterpillars. The bait can be made with 12 kg rice bran, 2.5 kg jaggery, carbaryl 10% dust and sufficient water per ha to make as a small round ball.
- Spray Profenophos 50 EC @ 2 ml per litre of water.

Larva feeding on leaves. (Photo by E. Neering)



Adult of Groundnut caterpillar. (Photo by E. Neering)



When using a pesticide, always wear protective clothing and follow the instructions on the product label, such as dosage, timing of application, and pre-harvest interval.

Scientific name(s) > *Spodoptera litura*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: India



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