



Entomology Insect Information Series

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Department of Entomology, Soils, and Plant Sciences • 114 Long Hall • Clemson, SC 29634-0315 • Phone: 864-656-3111
email: dpento@clemson.edu

Tobacco Budworm

The tobacco budworm is one of the most important (if not **the** most important) pests of tobacco in South Carolina. Budworms may damage tobacco in one of two ways. The direct damage is the actual leaf area that is destroyed by feeding. That may be significant in itself. However, early season feeding on the bud may also cause stunting of the plant, thus reducing yield both directly and indirectly. The most susceptible period to damage by the budworm is the first four weeks after transplanting. The holes caused by budworm feeding grow round and smooth with aging, making the damage fairly easy to distinguish from the jagged feeding of hornworms.



Tobacco budworm larva feeding on a leaf.
Photo: Clemson University CE Series 119-2213A

The adults of tobacco budworms are small moths having a wingspread of about 1 ½ inches. The front wings are a pale green color crossed by four oblique light bands, the inner three of which are edged in black. The moths are night fliers, and the female lays her eggs singly on tobacco leaves or in the bud. The larvae, or worms, are green with pale longitudinal stripes. They are about 1 ½ inches in length when full grown.

Tobacco budworms first appear in our tobacco areas of South Carolina around the last week of April, although this may vary by a couple of weeks from one area to another. A second generation may appear around the first of June.

The tobacco budworm is fairly difficult to control on tobacco, although several insecticides are available for that purpose. There are different methods of application as well as different insecticides. Since the list of labeled products is constantly changing, and since available products varies from state to state, there will be no mention of specific products. With all insecticides, read and follow label instructions carefully.



Tobacco budworm larva feeding in the bud.
Photo: Clemson University CE Series 120-4599.

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Prepared by Donald G. Manley, Extension Entomologist/Professor, Department of Entomology, Soils, and Plant Sciences, Clemson University.

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Eiis/AG-10 (New 03/1999).