



Squash Vine Borer

Common name: Squash Vine Borer

Scientific name: Order *Lepidoptera*, family *Sesiidae*, *Melittia cucurbitae*

Size: Adult--1", larva--1" to 1 1/2"

Identification: Adults are beautiful, narrow-winged black- and red-bodied moths that look like wasps. Eggs are brown, flat, oval, and singly laid on stems. Larvae are white caterpillars with brown heads.

Biology and life cycle: Larvae tunnel into the base of vine stems, feed for four to six weeks, and cause the entire plant to wilt and die. They hibernate as larvae or pupae in cocoons about an inch deep in the soil. One or two generations a year.

Feeding habits: Larvae (borers) enter the base of the stem in early summer, causing a greenish frass, and leading to wilting, and death. They will also feed on fruit of cucumbers, gourds, melons, pumpkins, and squash.

Economic importance: Destruction of squash plants.

Natural control: Plant more than just a few plants. Plant early and promote vigorous growth. Plant cucurbits with more solid stems, such as butternut and winter squash. Put out Beneficial nematodes.

Organic control: Spray with "Cedar Gard" every 7 to 10 days. This will confuse the insect when mating or looking for food. If the bores have infected the vine slit the stem and remove the borer. Pile soil over the damaged stalk. Some say injecting *Bacillus thuringiensis* or beneficial nematodes in the stalk with a syringe works. Both methods are a lot of trouble. Cover plants with floating row cover, but remove when the female flowers start to form. Spray plants with a Bt product when yellow flowers first bloom. Check the base of stems often to remove the reddish eggs before they hatch. Treat soil with beneficial nematodes.

Insight: Squash vine borers tend to avoid big squash farms but destroy home gardens, so plant more plants.