Hornworms in Home Gardens


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Two species of hornworm damage tomato plants in Virginia, the tobacco hornworm, *Manduca sexta* (Linnaeus) and the tomato hornworm *Manduca quinquemaculata* (Haworth) (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Sphingidae).

Description: Both species are green with diagonal lines on sides and prominent horn on rear end. They can be up to 4 inches long.

Common Host Plant(s): Tomato, eggplant, tobacco, and pepper.

Damage: Theses caterpillars feed on leaves and green fruit. They are typically found on the upper portions of the plant. Since they consume 90% of the foliage just before they pupate they seem to appear “overnight”. This is not actually true; the smaller stages of the caterpillars did limited feeding that was quickly covered by regrowth. They in fact were on the same plant all along.

Distribution: Throughout Virginia.

Cultural Control: Hand pick worms, but do not destroy caterpillars with cocoons, leave in garden to continue biological control.

Organic/Biological Control: *Bacillus thuringiensis*, Bt, will control the caterpillars but must be applied when they are less then ½ inch long.

Chemical Control: Apply a labeled insecticide, following all instructions and precautions. Insecticides must also be applied when the caterpillars are less then ½ inch long.

References

University of Florida fact sheet: common name: tobacco hornworm scientific name: *Manduca sexta* (Linnaeus) (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Sphingidae), common name: tomato hornworm scientific name: *Manduca quinquemaculata* (Haworth) (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Sphingidae), http://entomology.ifas.ufl.edu/creatures/field/hornworm.htm