

CABBAGE WORMS

Cabbage worms, or cabbage loopers, are bright green caterpillars, sometimes showing two thin white lines down their backs. Although they can measure up to 1 1/2 inches long, their coloring helps them to blend in easily with the green foliage of the cabbage family plants they favor (broccoli, cabbage, kale, collards, etc.), making them difficult to spot.

If you find small ball-shaped green droppings on leaves or collecting in the center of a plant, that may be a sign that your plant is infested with cabbage worms.

The significant damage left behind—large holes in the leaves—is another indicator. If the worms are left unchecked or the plant is young, they can destroy an entire plant.

White cabbage moths lay their eggs on plant leaves, producing worms that can be found either on the tops or often on the undersides of leaves. In a small home garden, hand-picking and killing them should do the trick. If you're squeamish about squishing them, they can be drowned in salty or soapy water instead. An organic alternative to hand-picking is to apply *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a naturally-occurring bacteria, to the plant leaves. This is helpful if you have a slightly larger garden and/or a more serious infestation of worms. As with many organic products, Bt will wash off with the rain and must be occasionally reapplied. While it's always a good idea to wash garden-fresh harvest thoroughly, if you've killed cabbage worms with Bt, they'll remain on the produce and you'll want to be especially careful to wash them off. Soak produce in a salt water bath for 15 minutes until the caterpillars float to the top. Rinse well with fresh water.



Cabbage worm on broccoli (top), picked cabbage worm on patient Teaching Garden participant's hand (right)

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