

A Bug's Life

Tomato Fruitworm

Helicoverpa zea

Fun facts

- Also called corn earworm
- Caterpillars tunnel into fruit of tomatoes or peppers, or ears of corn
- Overwinter as pupae in soil

Host plants

- Tomatoes, corn, peppers, lettuce, legumes, other fruits and vegetables

Identification

Damage: Black hole at the base of tomato stem, fruit may have frass, decay or larva inside

Caterpillar: Up to 1-1/2" long, various colors, tan heads, lengthwise stripes, small raised dark, bumps

Moth: 1-1/2" wingspan, light yellow-olive in color, dark spot on forewing

Management

- Handpick caterpillars before entry into fruit
- Dispose of fallen and infested fruit
- Desiccant soil barrier of diatomaceous earth around stems
- Organic options include *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Btk) and spinosad; synthetic options include pyrethroids
- Plant resistant corn hybrids (Bt corn)



Photos: J. Green