

**Problem:** Tomato Fruitworm or Corn Earworm - *Helicoverpa zea* (Boddie)



**Description:** The tomato fruitworm is also known as the corn earworm and cotton bollworm. The adult stage of this insect is a buff colored moth with a wing span of about 1½ inches. The females prefer fresh corn silk on which to lay their eggs but may choose crops (such as tomato fruit) if corn silk is unavailable. Eggs are white and about the size of a pin head when laid, developing a reddish colored ring later. They are often eaten by a small wasp, which causes them to turn black. The eggs hatch into worms that crawl toward the small, young fruit. They bore into the fruit eating a large cavity inside. They enter near the stem or in the stem scar where the stem attaches to the fruit. Unlike sweet corn where the worms stay in one ear, tomato fruitworms may eat from one fruit to another.

**Recommendations:** You can scout for fruitworm eggs on the undersides of young leaves on tomato plants. Once the worm is inside the fruit eating, there is little that can be done for control. Fruits usually rot from secondary bacteria or fungi that enter the fruit through the worm holes. Recommended products include BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), cyfluthrin (Bayer Vegetable and Garden Insect Spray) or spinosad (SpinTor; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew; Conserve; Borer, Bagworm, Tent Caterpillar & Leafminer Spray) for control. BT and spinosad are organic products.

**References:**

[Tomato Insect Pests](#), HGIC 2218 Home & Garden Information Center, Clemson University Extension

**Last Update:** 1/23/2018

---

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

*“Knowledge for Life”*

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service