

Problem: Common Stalk Borer, *Papaipema nebris* (Guenee)



Host Plants: Indiscriminate feeder with over 175 species affected.

Description: If you notice a plant in your vegetable or flower garden suddenly wilt and die for no apparent reason, a stalk borer might be the cause. (Sometimes only a branch dies while the rest of the plant remains okay.) There are several types of insects that can bore into stems, but the usual one is the common stalk borer.

The adult is a moth that lays eggs along the stems and leaves of plants, but the damage is done by the larvae which bore into the stem and tunnels along the inside. Late instar larvae, half grown or larger, often migrate to cultivated plants from grasses and weeds. The larvae enter the stem by boring a hole. Frass is pushed out of the hole. Stems that are narrow and more succulent are more likely to be damaged. Cutting into the stem will reveal the larvae.

Recommendations: Controlling weeds and grasses near vegetables and flowers will prevent eggs from overwintering. Unfortunately, there is little that can be done once the larva has entered the stem. Some people have suggested slitting along the stem, removing or killing the larvae, and wrapping the stem back together or covering it with soil. This may not work well in our hot, dry summer conditions. Fortunately, stalk borer injury is sporadic, damaging a plant here and there. And there is only one generation per year, so the damage usually doesn't spread. Insecticides have not been found to be effective.

References:

1. [Stalk Borer](#), Penn State Extension
2. [Common Stalk Borer](#), Iowa State University, Extension and Outreach, Horticulture and Home Pest News

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