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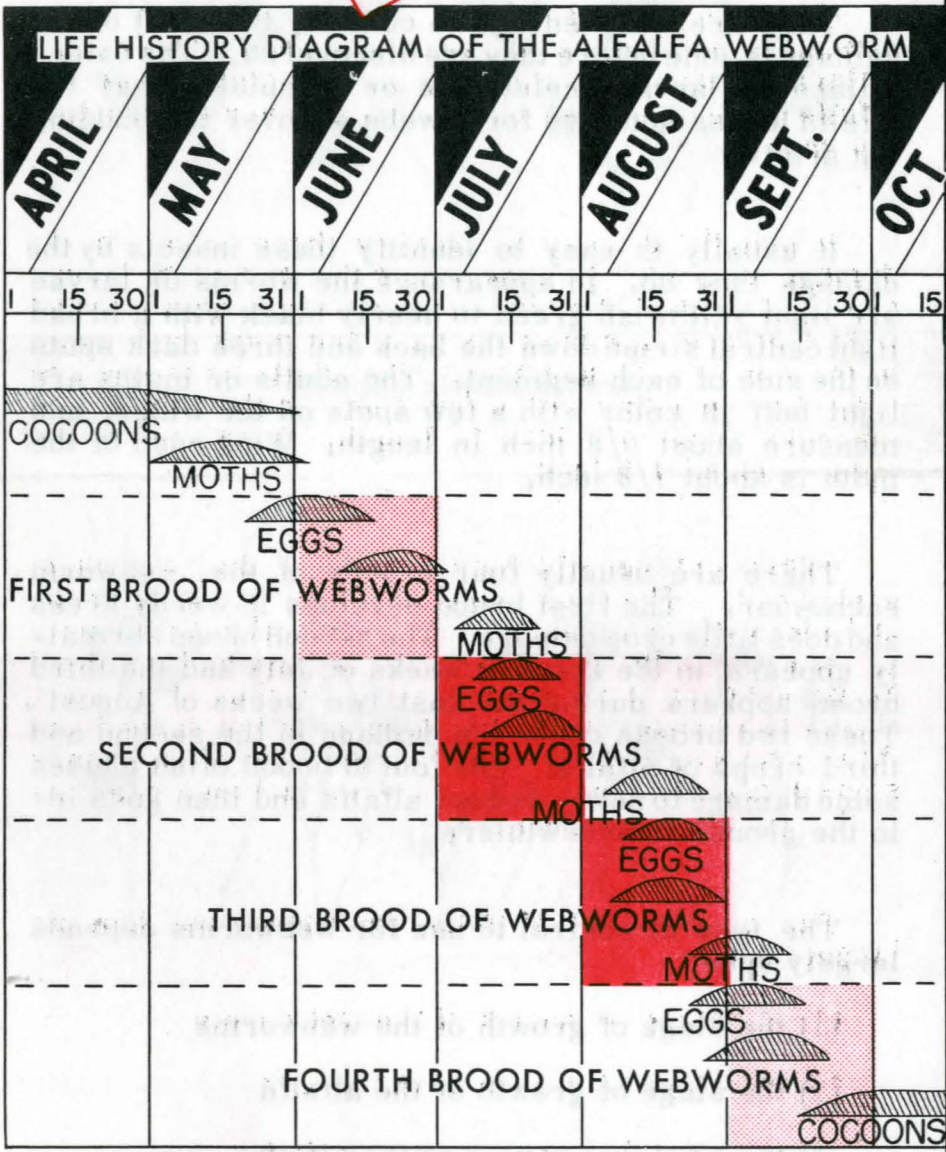
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GARDEN WEBWORM IN ALFALFA

DAMAGE



Garden Webworm Damage in Alfalfa

Robert W. Helm, Extension Entomologist

During certain years garden webworms cause Nebraska alfalfa growers a great deal of concern.

They are easy enough to control, but most of the damage is done before they are discovered. The caterpillars or larvae skeletonize or completely eat the alfalfa leaves and also form webs all over the budding top growth.

It usually is easy to identify these insects by the damage they do. In appearance the worms or larvae are light yellowish green to nearly black with a broad light central stripe down the back and three dark spots on the side of each segment. The adults or moths are light buff in color with a few spots on the wings, and measure about $3/8$ inch in length. Wing span of the moth is about $7/8$ inch.

There are usually four broods of the webworm each year. The first brood develops in weedy areas and does little crop damage. The second brood normally appears in the last two weeks of July and the third brood appears during the last two weeks of August. These two broods cause the damage in the second and third crops of alfalfa. The fourth brood often causes some damage to newly seeded alfalfa and then goes into the ground to overwinter.

The type of control to use for webworms depends largely upon:

- (1) the stage of growth of the webworms
- (2) the stage of growth of the alfalfa
- (3) the final disposition of the alfalfa.



Healthy alfalfa stems.



Alfalfa stems damaged by garden webworms.

Alfalfa to be used for forage can be cut closely as soon as the webworms are noticed. This eliminates the food supply because the worm cannot live on dried alfalfa. If the worms have not finished eating when the alfalfa is cut, they will die. If they have finished feeding, there is nothing that can be done except to watch the crop for the next brood appearance.

If the infested crop has just begun a new growth and is not over three or four inches high, it may be advisable to apply an insecticide. One pound of actual DDT per acre either as a dust or spray is recommended. This treatment would also apply to alfalfa which is being left for seed production, to be applied at any time before 1/5-bloom stage. After this stage, it would be safer to use two pounds of toxaphene per acre instead. Apply the toxaphene before 7:00 A.M. or after 7:00 P.M. when honey bees are not working in the field. This same treatment will also give you good control of lygus bugs in alfalfa which is being left for seed production.



Alfalfa stem showing leaflets webbed together by garden webworm. Specimens of garden webworm, actual size.