

Squash Vine Borers (*Melittia cucurbitae*)



Figure 1 Adult



Figure 2 Squash borer larvae in vine

Damage

The first symptom of feeding damage is when plants wilt midday. This wilting is caused by larvae as they tunnel through vines and destroy the tissue that transports water. Look for entrance holes near the base of wilting vines. If frass (i.e. feces) is present near the entrance holes, carefully split the stem lengthwise to confirm the presence of larvae.

When Are They Active

Squash vine borer pupate over the winter in the soil. They emerge as moths in late June – July. Female moths lay small, brown eggs, near the base of the plant. Eggs hatch in 7-10 days and the larvae immediately begin to burrow into vines. Here they feed for 14-30 days. Fully grown larvae then leave the plant to pupate. There is only one generation a year.

Susceptible Plants

Pumpkins and squash, especially winter squash, are susceptible.

Prevention Methods

Plant vine crops that are usually not attacked by squash vine borers, such as butternut squash, cucumbers, melons, and watermelons. A second planting of summer squash made in early July will mature after adult borers have finished laying eggs. Promptly pull and destroy any plants killed by squash vine borers. To prevent the flying adults from laying eggs at the base of plants in late June or early July, monitor for their presence and cover plants with floating row cover during this period. Don't use row covers if cucurbits were planted in the same area the previous year because borers may have overwintered and will be trapped under the row cover. Row covers should be removed during blooming to allow pollination.

Treatment Methods

Although the chance of saving the plant is not good, you can try to kill the borer inside the vine. As soon as wilting is noticed, use a sharp knife to cut a slit in the affected stem. Slice carefully up the vine until you locate the borer (or borers). Once you have killed any borers with the tip of the knife, mound moist soil over the cut area and keep this spot well watered. New roots may grow along the cut stem, allowing the plant to survive.

Additional Information/Resources

- UW Extension Garden Fact Sheet [XHT1136 Squash Vine Borer](#)
- University of Minnesota Extension [Squash vine borer management in home gardens](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline [608-224-3721](tel:608-224-3721) (M-F, 9 am-12 noon, April 15 – October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com