

# African armyworm: Life cycle and damage to plants

The African armyworm lifecycle includes egg, 5-6 growth stages of caterpillar development (instars), pupa and moth.

This diagram illustrates the lifecycle, showing where the African armyworm is usually found on plants at any given stage.

After approximately **10-14 days** the fully grown caterpillar seek soft damp soil, at the base of plants or sandy banks in which they burrow and pupate.

## GROWTH STAGES IV-VII

The gregarious phase of the caterpillar has velvety black upper surface with white lines running along the sides.

The head is shiny black with an inverted V-shaped mark.

The caterpillars have a green or pale yellow underside and do not have any hairs on the body.

The gregarious caterpillars at stage (IV-VI) are the most destructive to pasture and crops.

They will feed on and damage leaves, growing points and young stems. Feeding can result in total defoliation or destruction of the plant to ground level.

## GROWTH STAGES I-III

After hatching the young caterpillars feed superficially, usually on the undersides of leaves. Feeding results in semitransparent patches on the leaves called windows.

Young caterpillars spin silken threads on which they are dispersed by the wind to a new plant.

Newly hatched caterpillars climb up the host plant and feed on the young stems soft leaves.

Young caterpillars are green in colour with a black head. As the caterpillars grow, they change colour depending on whether it is solitary or gregarious. Solitary. Caterpillars remain green in colour.

A single female can lay between 400 and 1300 eggs during her lifetime. **Eggs** are generally laid on the underside of the leaves.

These are covered in protective scales rubbed off from the moths abdomen after laying. The scales protect the eggs from predators, dehydration and natural enemies (predators). The eggs are laid on both crops and pastures.

After approximately **7-12 days** the adult moth emerges to restart the cycle.

The caterpillar will **burrow 2-3 cm into the soil**. The then form a loose silk oval shape cocoon **10-14 mm in length**.

If the soil is dry and too hard then the caterpillar will not be able to burrow and die.

DAY 7-10

DAY 2-6

DAY 1-2

