

HORRORS! IT'S SQUASH VINE BORERS!

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There's nothing quite like fresh, homegrown squash for dinner on a hot summer evening. Summer squash is one of the most popular vegetables grown by home gardeners, but it's not without its share of frustrations. Early June and August bring the highest numbers of squash vine borers.

Squash vine borer is a very common insect pest in South Carolina. Wilting of one runner or the entire plant is often the first thing you'll notice. Closer inspection will reveal a granular, light green material where the borer has pushed its way out of the stem. If you slit open the stem, you'll see a white, wrinkled, brown-headed caterpillar up to one inch long and about ¼ inch thick. Damage is usually found at the base of the plant, but can appear throughout the stem if the problem has gone unnoticed.

Home gardeners may have some luck by removing the borer. Make a slit in the vine with a sharp blade and remove the larva. You may also pierce the insect with a pin by inserting the pin into the stem at the site of damage. Cover the injured area with moist garden soil. You might also want to put a shovelful of soil over the vine at several locations on the plant to encourage the stems to root where they touch the ground- this will strengthen the plant by encouraging it to grow new roots and will make it easier to overcome squash vine borer attacks at the main base of the plant.

There are also cultural controls for squash vine borer. Crop rotation is important—squash should not follow squash. Disking the area in the fall will expose the insects— this should be followed by a deep plowing in the spring. Destroy any vines that have had borers after harvest— this will keep the late caterpillars from finishing their development. Plant your summer squash early— borers tend to more severe later in the season.

Chemical control works only if it is started before the first sign of attack. Plants should be treated just before they begin to bloom and then weekly as needed. The products listed below are toxic to bees (which are needed for pollination), so be sure to apply them in the evening when bees are not active and apply sprays *only* to the lower area of the stem. Always follow label instructions. Try a rotenone-pyrethrin mix such as Bonide Liquid Rotenone-Pyrethrins Concentrate or a clarified hydrophobic extract of neem oil such as Southern Ag Triple Action Neem Oil.

For answers to all your home gardening and food safety questions, call the Home & Garden Information Center at 1-888-656-9988 or visit us online at <http://hgic.clemson.edu>