

Pest Profile



Photo credit: (Left) Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org; (Right) Robert A. Martin, Montana Natural Heritage Program

Common Name: Alfalfa Looper

Scientific Name: *Autographa californica*

Order and Family: Lepidoptera, Noctuidae

Size and Appearance:

	Length (mm)	Appearance
Egg		The eggs of the alfalfa looper are pale yellow and turning darker as it gets closer to hatching. They are round and have ridges that go from the base of the egg to the top.
Larva	24 mm	The larvae can vary in color, but on alfalfa they are usually light green. Typically, there is a distinct white stripe that runs the midline of the back from the base of the head. There is also a single white stripe that is present on each side of the abdomen and thorax. The true legs and the side of the head of the alfalfa looper are black, which can help distinguish it from the cabbage looper. There are three pairs of fleshy abdominal legs (prolegs), with one anal pair and two pairs along the length of the abdomen. The alfalfa looper lacks the reduced prolegs on the third and fourth segment which can help in distinguishing them from the cabbage looper.
Adult	Wingspan 36-42mm	The adults are medium sized, gray-black moth that has silvery sheen and a slight purplish cast in fresh specimens. The forewings are mottled a pale grey in bottom portion, and in the middle, there is a distinct tear-shaped light marking. Approximately one-third of the way down, the subterminal line is a black dash which runs from the bottom portion to the middle of the forewing. The hindwings are a dark sooty blackish brown. They are paler in the basal or bottom half and shaded into a wide dark terminal band.
Pupa (if applicable)	20 mm	The pupa is enclosed in a silken web that is spun by the mature caterpillar and usually found attached to leaves. It is brown in color and has no protrusions extending from the pupal case.

Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.): The larva or caterpillar has chewing mouthparts and the adult has siphoning mouthparts (proboscis).

Host/s: The alfalfa looper caterpillar feeds on over 50 genera of herbaceous and woody plants; however, its common host is alfalfa and clover which is the greatest management concern. The larvae are also known to feed on canola as well. The adult moth feeds on nectar.

Description of Damage (larvae and adults): When the larvae hatch, they first skeletonize the leaves close to the hatch site and disperse within the plant vegetation as they mature. The mature larvae can cut into the leaf from the leaf margin and can continue feeding until the entire leaf is consumed. If several infestations occur, there can be considerable loss in foliage.

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