

Geranium Budworm

The geranium budworm is one of the most serious pests nationwide. Most of the damage is seen on cotton and tobacco crops in the South, but in Colorado this insect damages the flowers of geraniums, snapdragons, petunias and nicotianas. Occasionally, roses and other flowers are damaged.

Its favorite target, as its name implies, is the geranium. The caterpillar attacks the flower buds and ovaries of the developing flower. Generally these buds will not develop, however, if they do, the petals will have a ragged appearance. Often the buds may turn brown and/or be hollow. When squeezed, the bud may go flat. Another sure sign of geranium budworm is the black “frass” or droppings on flowers, leaves or the ground.

Due to our mostly mild winters, it is very hard for Mother Nature to kill the overwintering pupa. Turning the soil in your flower gardens and containers may help, since it brings the pupa to the surface and may freeze. The best control is removing the larvae (caterpillars) from the affected plants destroying the larvae and the best time of day to find them is at dusk when they are most active. During the day they hide around the base of the plant.

Few chemical controls are effective, but *Bacillus Thuringiensis*, or pyrethroid can reliably provide some control. If geraniums and affected plants are over wintered in a protected area pupae will survive. It's best to replot these plants before overwintering and the pupae removed.