

Hungry Caterpillars

Enemies of the Spring and Fall Garden

*A lesson from the New Jersey Agricultural Society's
Learning Through Gardening Program*

OVERVIEW: You go out to your spring vegetable garden, eager to harvest some kale or cabbage, only to discover that someone has gotten there first and the leaves are full of holes! Caterpillars will reek havoc on your cool-season vegetables if you're not paying attention, but it's easy to prevent their damage if you know what to look for. Turn your students into garden detectives and be alert for intruders!



OBJECTIVES:

- Identify cabbage, cabbage loopers, and diamondback moths and caterpillars
- Identify the signs that moths or caterpillars are in the garden

GRADES: K-5

MATERIALS:

The *Learning Through Gardening* power point presentation "Hungry Caterpillars - Enemies of the Spring and Fall Garden"

Tape

Optional: Magnifying glasses for students to use when looking for caterpillar eggs

PROCEDURE:

Show and discuss the power point presentation. Ask students what they think they should do to prevent their vegetables from being destroyed by caterpillars. (Watch for moths, check the tops and undersides of leaves regularly for eggs, remove any caterpillars.)

During each trip to the spring or fall garden, pair students and have each pair check a designated patch of the garden for evidence of caterpillars. Show students how to wrap tape around their hands to remove eggs from leaves. Students record any evidence and action taken on hungry invaders in their science journals.

EVALUATION:

Students use notes from their science journals to write a paragraph or paragraphs on their experiences with cabbage worms, loopers, and diamondbacks. Publish their findings in a school newsletter.

EXTENSIONS:

Ask students to research the life cycle of the three types of caterpillars and give a report to the class.

Ask older students to write and illustrate a how-to book on dealing with caterpillars for younger students to use.

The cabbage looper is native to North America, but the cabbage and diamondback moths are invasive insects. Have your students investigate this difference and the impact on the environment of invasive species.