



## Topic: Tomato Fruitworm Damage

**Question:** Question: I wonder if you could tell me what is damaging my tomatoes based on the attached pictures. The holes do not go all the way into the center of the tomato and seem to heal over. They are present in the green tomatoes also.

Dorothy, Cape Coral

**Answer:** This type of injury is typical of a tomato fruitworms also known as the corn earworm (*Helicoverpa zea*). The larvae is a caterpillar and the adult a moth that is active at night. Tomato fruitworm attacks a wide variety of edible crops including melon, bean, pea, pepper and potato. Larvae commonly burrow into a fruit, feed for a short time, and then attack another fruit. The species is active all year. Mature larvae leave the feeding site, drop to the ground and bury themselves in the soil to pupate. The insect is controlled by many natural enemies. However, the gardener can use a combination of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) plus an insecticides like Sevin or one of the Pyrethroids. Bt is less effective as the larvae rapidly eats into the fruit limiting its exposure to Bt.



Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by sending an email to [brownsh@leegov.com](mailto:brownsh@leegov.com). Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml>. For native plants click on Publications A-Z.

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