

## Pea Moth

By Arthur L. Antonelli, Extension Entomologist  
WSU Puyallup

The pea moth, *Cydia nigricana* (Fig. 1), is a “sometimes” pest of the homegrown peas. Its presence is rarely detected until the gardener begins to harvest mature peas. At this time, as the peas are shelled, it becomes obvious that if present – a yellowish white caterpillar about ½ inch long at maturity, has been dining on the seeds. Evidence of its past presence includes the obvious emergence hole in the side of the pod, copious excremental pellets (or frass), and irregular cavities in the seeds themselves. Affected pods become yellow or ripen prematurely.

The larvae spend the winter in a silken soil cocoon found just below the soil surface. They pupate in the late spring. Sometime in the growing season (exact time coincides with heat unit accumulations), the adults emerge, mate, and lay individual eggs on blossoms, stems, leaves, or pods. Pea moths attack peas, sweet peas, and vetch. At hatching, the young larvae burrow through the pod leaving a small, almost undetectable entry hole. After 2-4 weeks, the larvae leave the pod to seek an overwintering site in the soil.

Chemical management of this pest is not recommended for the home gardener due to their feeding locale. To an extent, the problem may be avoided by planting as early as possible and not delaying harvest. If the problem is historical, then rotation out of host plant types for a year or two will help immensely to suppress the problem for your next pea crop.



Fig. 1. Pea moth larva and damage to the seed. By A.L. Antonelli