

## Silver-Y moth

(*Autographa gamma*)

### What does it look like?

The silver-Y moth has grey-brown forewings with a characteristic silver-white 'Y' (or greek gamma) on the upper wings. Unlike most moths, adults are often active during daylight hours, feeding on flower nectar. They are capable of rapid flight. Larvae (caterpillars) are green and have only three pairs of prolegs (not the usual five), producing a characteristic looping movement when they move.



Adult silver-Y moth with characteristic Y on the forewings; the wingspan is approximately 35–40 mm.



Caterpillars (20-40 mm) are green with a dark dorsal stripe and a yellow-white line along the sides.



Pupae are brown-black, 16–21 mm and enclosed in a silken cocoon. Cocoons are usually on the underside of a leaf but may also be in the soil.

### Which crops are affected?

The silver-Y moth is highly polyphagous, feeding on over 300 plant species. Crops favourites, and those that suffer the greatest economic damage include Brassicas (e.g. cabbages, Brussels sprouts, broccoli), lettuce, potato, spinach and legumes including beans and peas. Lettuce is considered one of the most susceptible crops.

### What does damage look like?

Damage is caused entirely by the caterpillars that eat through leaf tissue as they mature, leaving only the veins intact in a characteristic stripped, skeletal appearance. Additional damage includes destruction of growing points, frass contamination causing commercial rejection of salad and brassica crops. Peas can also be contaminated by caterpillars because of challenges with grading. Adults cause no damage.



Caterpillars cause all the damage feeding on host crops. Adult moths do not cause any damage.

## Where do they currently occur?

Silver-Y moth is native to and permanently established across Europe, Asia and northern Africa. Seasonal migration extends its range into northern Europe each summer. Larvae and eggs are frequently intercepted at ports globally on imported cut flowers, produce and ornamentals. Silver-Y moth is not present in Australia. Silver Y moth prefers warm Mediterranean and humid subtropical climates. Damage is worst during hot, dry late summers when third-generation populations peak.

## Lifecycle

Females lay eggs the underside of leaves. The caterpillars feed for 2–7 weeks before pupating in silken cocoons on foliage. There can be as many as three generations per season before adults migrate south ahead of autumn frosts. Note that this is the lifecycle for Europe.

## How do they spread?

Silver-Y moth are highly migratory. The moth overwinters in the Mediterranean Basin and North Africa, migrating northward into Europe from early spring, with peak arrivals in summer.

## How can they be managed?

Early treatment is critical because young larvae are more susceptible to crop protection products than older ones. Pheromone traps are used overseas to monitor for moths and action thresholds have been determined. Control options include biological and chemical products. Cultural options include deep ploughing and encouraging natural parasitoids.



## What should I look for?

Damage is similar to that caused by other looper caterpillars. Window-paned leaves with veins intact, accumulation of dark frass on leaves and in crop canopies, and small, green looping caterpillars (3 pairs of prolegs) on the undersides of leaves. Adults with the distinctive silver Y mark on the upper wing may be seen feeding on flowers during daylight.



Silver Y moth larva with yellow banding and window pane hole damage caused to the leaf through feeding.



Silken cocoon around pupae; note frass in web. Frass is often seen on leaves.



Look out for the characteristic Y (or gamma) marks on the upper wings.

Image credits: L to R: Koppert.com; V Moycka biolib.cz

Updated: March 2026. The material presented is for information only and no person should act, or fail to act on the basis of this material without first obtaining professional advice. AUSVEG and all persons acting for AUSVEG expressly disclaim liability with respect to anything done in reliance on this publication.