



## Pacific Pests, Pathogens & Weeds - Mini Fact Sheet Edition

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### Taro cluster caterpillar (031)



Photo 1. Egg mass and young caterpillars of *Spodoptera litura* eating the underside of the leaf.



Photo 2. As the caterpillars of *Spodoptera litura* enlarge they eat deeper into the leaf; in this photo they have eaten the top surface of the leaf.



Photo 3. Caterpillars of *Spodoptera litura* have eaten through the leaf of *Alocasia macrorrhizos*, from the under surface, leaving the top waxy layer.



Photo 4. Mature caterpillar of *Spodoptera litura*.



Photo 5. Adult *Spodoptera litura*.



Photo 6. *Spodoptera litura* on capsicum, under protected cropping.



Photo 7. *Spodoptera litura* caterpillars on *Basella* species under protected cropping.



Photo 8. *Spodoptera litura* damage on *Basella* species under protected cropping.

## Summary

- Widespread distribution. Tropics of Asia, Oceania. On cabbages, tomato, okra, chilli, cassava, maize, sweetpotato, rice, eggplant, watercress, and more. An important pest.
- Egg masses on either side of the leaves. Young caterpillars strip the leaf surface; older ones eat the leaves including the leaf stalks. Mostly feeding at night.
- The moth is a strong flyer.
- Cultural control: check for egg masses regularly, and destroy them by hand; allow chicken in the field.
- Natural enemies: predators and parasitoid wasps. Effective unless disturbed by cyclones or droughts.
- Chemical control: PDPs: neem, derris, pyrethrum, or chilli; spinosad or Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) on young caterpillars. Alternatively, use synthetic pyrethroids, but they are likely to kill natural enemies.

## Common Name

Taro cluster caterpillar, taro armyworm, tobacco cutworm, tropical armyworm

## Scientific Name

*Spodoptera litura*

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AUTHORS Helen Tsatsia & Grahame Jackson

Photo 2 SKumar, Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Photo 5 Wikipedia. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spodoptera\\_litura](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spodoptera_litura)). Photos 6-8 Mani Maa, SPC, Sigatoka Research Station, Fiji.

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