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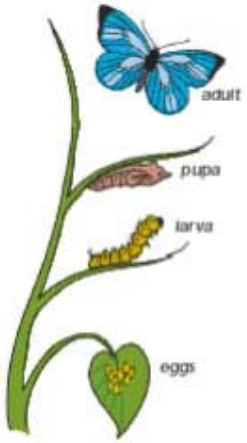
Insect Life Cycles

Introduction

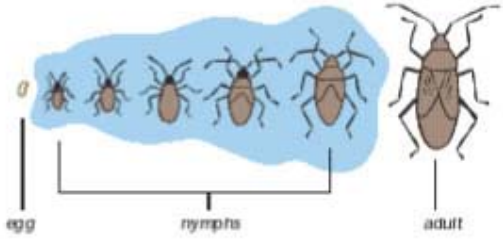
Most crop pests are arthropods, which means they have external skeletons and jointed legs. Within this group, there are insects which have 6 legs as adults and mites which have 8 legs as adults (but 6 legs when younger). Arthropods are usually considered to be pests if they eat any part of the crop plant (chewing pests), or if they suck the crop plant juices (sucking pests). The damage may be caused by adults or by the younger stages called larvae or in some cases nymphs. Other serious pests of vegetables include nematodes, tiny worms that live in and feed on plant roots (plant parasites), and larger animals such as rats, monkeys and even hippos.

Life stages of arthropods

Arthropods can look very different at different stages in their life cycle. It is useful to understand these different forms so that pests can be identified regardless of the stage they have reached in their life cycle. Arthropods go through a process called metamorphosis which means change of form. Some have complete metamorphosis where the young stages look completely different from the adults - see the butterfly in the left hand picture below. Others go through incomplete metamorphosis where the young look a little like small versions of the adult, but without fully developed wings - see the bug in the right hand picture below.



Example of complete metamorphosis where the young stages look very different from the adult



Example of incomplete metamorphosis where the young stages look similar to the adult