Benton County Master Gardener Problem Diagnosis Scenario #50
(Cutworm)

**Problem:** “My corn plants and other vegetables are being eaten by something. Help!”

**Description:** Young shoots have been cut down, and older foliage appears to be dying.

**Questions/Answers:**
Question: Describe the foliage problem you are observing.
Answer: In the mornings small plants are lying on the ground, cut off at the stem.

Question: Describe the other symptoms you are observing.
Answer: The shoots are coming up from the ground with chewed spots on them.

Question: When did you first notice the problem?
Answer: It started this spring, and now I'm afraid I could lose all my precious corn.

Question: Have you seen any insects or worms in the garden during the day?
Answer: No, I've seen nothing. I thought I had slugs, but there are no slime trails anywhere.

**References:**

**Diagnosis:** Cutworms –The larvae or caterpillars of some moths are called cutworms (*Agrotis, Amathes, Peridroma, Prodenia spp.*) because of the manner in which they cut down young plants as they feed. The adults are night-flying moths which feed on nectar, if at all, and do no damage.

**Recommended Action:**
**Cultural control:** Cultivate the soil frequently to injure and expose them. Handpicking can be effective at night with a flashlight when cutworms are active.

**Biological control:** Planting a border of sunflower plants will attract the cutworms and make gathering and removal easier.

**Chemical control:** Chemical treatments are available to the home gardener (See PNW Insect Management Handbook).