

Allium Leaf Miner

Having had my crop of leeks wiped out by this pest this autumn, I suspect other members may have suffered the same fate. Too late to do anything about it this year, but be prepared to protect your Alliums [Onions, leeks, garlic, shallots and chives] next Spring. This pernicious pest has been spreading rapidly in the UK since first being reported in 2002 in the Midlands. The adult is a small fly about 3mm long, which lays its eggs on the leaves of *Allium* species. After the eggs hatch, the larvae bore into the leaves and eat them away from the inside, before travelling down to the stem or bulb to pupate. The first signs are often of distorted leaves showing white streaks down the axis of the leaf. The stem is often bored and the plant flops over. Needless to say, the plants are ruined and inedible!

The grubs are white legless maggots, which eventually pupate in the stems or bulbs. Damage is fairly rapid, with the maggot pupating in about two to three weeks from hatching. The pupae are about 5 mm long, and brown in colour. The fly has two generations a year – adult flies are active in March – April, and a second generation in October- November. This is usually the most damaging to leeks, as it is active when the leeks should be growing! There are no effective chemical controls available to the home gardener, so the only course of action is to prevent attack. This can be done either by the use of an insect-proof barrier [such as Enviromesh[®] or fleece], or avoiding the times when the adult flies are active – i.e., planting out after the end of April or November, but this method is at odds with the normal cropping plans for Alliums. **Crop rotation** must be used, as pupae can end up in the soil from infested plants. **Any infested plants should be burnt**, and not composted, as the compost heap may not get hot enough to kill the pupae. (Similar damage may be caused by the Leek moth, but the grubs are caterpillars – they have legs – and form pupae outside the plant. They tunnel the stems of Alliums, again rendering them inedible. The control is again prevention – protection against the leaf miner will also protect from Leek moth.) As the moths are active from April to October, avoidance methods are unlikely to be successful.

Malcolm Iosson, November 2015