



## Insect Answers:

# Pear Slug

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION FACT SHEET • FSIPM004

The pear slug, *Caliroa cerasi*, is really not a slug. It is a sawfly, which is an insect related to bees, ants, and wasps. The pear slug is a common pest in the Pacific Northwest, attacking a wide variety of hosts. While it favors pear and cherry, it also attacks plum, hawthorn, buttonbrush, and mountain ash. The immature sawfly larva damages these plants by feeding on the surface of the leaves, skeletonizing them, and leaving only a network of veins. There is also a species that attacks rose, called the rose slug.

### Life History

This insect overwinters as a pupa in a cocoon formed in an earthen cell 2 to 3 inches below the soil surface. Adult emergence occurs over a period of time, typically starting in early summer (June to July).

The adult sawfly is about  $\frac{1}{5}$ -inch long, shiny black, with darkened wings. Female sawflies insert eggs into the leaves of a host plant. After 1 to 2 weeks the eggs hatch, and young larvae begin to feed on the upper surface of the leaf.

Pear slugs are yellow just after molting, but they soon secrete a slime, which gives them a characteristic

olive green or blackish color. Their bodies, somewhat enlarged in front and tapering towards the rear, appear somewhat like a horseshoe nail or a tadpole. The mature “slug” or larva is about  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch long when mature. Larval development up to this point takes 2 to 3 weeks, after which larvae crawl or drop to the ground, burrow into the soil, and change into the pupal stage.

In about 2 weeks, starting usually in early August in the northwest, adults emerge to begin the second generation. The cycle repeats itself, concluding in early to late September as mature larvae seek shelter in the soil for overwintering.

### Control

Pear slug larvae can, of course, be physically removed from the tree and destroyed. This method is practical only on small trees, or if larvae are few and the leaves can be reached. When this method becomes impractical, and heavy skeletonizing is apparent, chemical control may be necessary. Be sure both larvae and serious damage are present before beginning a spray program. Chemical sprays applied after larvae have left the tree to enter the soil do no



*Larva and pear slug damage.*  
R.D. Akre photo.



*Pear slug adult.*  
K. Gray photo.

good. If heavy damage is not noted until well into fall, a pesticide application will do little good, since the tree will naturally lose its leaves soon anyway.

For chemical control of pear slug in commercial orchards, growers can seek options from the PNW Insect Management Handbook which is revised annually. Homeowners seeking chemical solutions can find them online at HortSense at <http://pep.wsu.edu/> which is also revised annually.



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Use pesticides with care. Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites as listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. If pesticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

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