

Pest Alert: Southern pink moth *Pyrausta inornatalis*



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

INTRODUCTION

An infestation of the southern pink moth (SPM), *Pyrausta inornatalis* (Crambidae), was found for the first time in Oregon in early July 2020. Adult moths were first noticed by home gardeners in SE Portland in their yards. ODA confirmed the identity in July. By the end of September, there were at least 10 confirmed sightings in a broad area of east Portland from Columbia Blvd in the north, to near Gladstone in the south, bounded by the Willamette River to the west and I-205 to the east (source: ODA & OSU submissions and iNaturalist observations). With such a wide distribution in Portland during the first year in which it was found, it is likely the pest has been in the area since at least 2019. SPM is native to the southeastern region of the US, including TX, and south into Mexico. In the last 15 years, its range



Image ©Chris Bennett

Adult southern pink moth at rest, SE Portland.

has expanded through the Southwest into NM, AZ, and CA. In the last two years, it has expanded its native range to northern NJ, in CA from the LA area to the SF Bay Area, and overseas to Japan. Oregon is now the farthest north it has been found in the US.

HOSTS

The caterpillar feeds on the flowers and buds of most species of sage (*Salvia* spp.), a group of plants in the mint family (Lamiaceae). While SPM apparently only feeds on plants in the genus *Salvia*, most or all species and varieties are potentially damaged, and basil (*Ocimum* spp. var.) has been noted as a possible host. Interestingly, the host plants for this moth were not even known as recently as 1976. Awareness of this moth has probably increased as the popularity of *Salvia* plant varieties have increased among gardeners seeking bright, suitable plants for pollinator gardens, particularly for hummingbirds.



Image ©Bud Hensley.

SPM caterpillars and damage with frass and webbing.

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DAMAGE/PEST STATUS

The larvae are functionally considered budworms, and damage is very similar to that caused by tobacco budworms on petunias and geraniums. Larvae commonly bore into and through the bases of flower buds and feed on expanded flowers causing bloom loss and drop. Other signs of presence include frass and loose webbing.

SPM is considered a garden and horticultural pest where it is found. Producers of seeds for culinary varieties might consider it as more of an agricultural pest. Nurseries will want to be aware of this moth as it can severely damage *Salvia* stock. Damage is heaviest on the flowers. It doesn't affect roots. Your local OSU Extension office may be able to suggest control options.



Image ©Missouri Botanical Garden



Image ©Anne Warner.

Larval coloration somewhat dependent on host blossom color; larva on red blossoms (L), on blue blossoms (R).

Pupa: The pupa is formed inside a loose, white silk cocoon on plant material.

OTHER REFERENCES

Distribution map of verified records:

<https://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/species/Pyrausta-a-inornatalis>

Pyrausta inornatalis, species page, BugGuide. 2003-2020 Iowa State University.

<https://bugguide.net/node/view/81627>

Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica. 2020. General information about species of *Salvia*.

<https://www.britannica.com/plant/Salvia>

Oregon State University Extension Newsletter

<https://blogs.oregonstate.edu/mgmetro/2020/09/01/southern-pink-moth-pyrausta-inornatalis/>

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IDENTIFICATION/LIFE STAGES

Adult: SPM is easy to recognize and unlike any other moth in our area. Wingspan is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{5}{8}$ inch long, forewings completely pink and hindwings mostly gray with pink near the outer edge. At rest, they have a distinctive triangular shape. Adults fly in the summer from July through September. It is currently unknown if SPM could have two generations in Oregon.

Larva: Full grown larvae are typically a translucent light green with prominent rows of black spots. They may sometimes show the coloration of the substrate on which they are feeding. Since this includes flowers, buds, and occasionally leaves, they might be blue to green colored on blue flowers or red colored on red flowers.



Image ©Anne Warner.
Pupa in silk.



Image ©Oregon Department of Agriculture
Adult southern pink moth.

MORE INFORMATION

To report this moth in Oregon outside of the East Portland area, please contact us:

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