

**INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**  
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Recently, three large caterpillars were brought to the office for identification. These caterpillars were two to three inches in length, green with white stripes and had a 'red horn' on the top of the last body segment. They were hornworm caterpillars. They were found on tomato plants and had pretty much defoliated them. While hornworm caterpillars prefer to feed on tomatoes, they will occasionally eat peppers and potatoes as well. The fully grown hornworm caterpillar will burrow into the soil and form a hard shiny pupa. The hornworm caterpillar is the larval stage of the sphinx moth.

The sphinx moth is medium to large sized with a large body and narrow elongated front wings. Their wingspread can range from two to four and a half inches. They are strong fliers with a rapid wing beat that produces a humming sound. They are occasionally mistaken for a humming bird due to similar behaviors. They hover in front of flowers and sip nectar from flowers through their "proboscis" (an extendable beak like hollow tube or tongue). When not in use the proboscis rests coiled against the underside of the head. Late summer is when they will be most visible feeding on the nectar found in deep throated flowers such as petunias and hostas. This will usually occur around dusk but can occur at other times during the day as well.

Do you find it difficult to decide when your muskmelons and watermelons are ready to harvest? Consider the following tips provided by Richard Jauron, ISU Horticulture Specialist: "the fruit of the muskmelon or cantaloupe is mature when the stem slips easily from the melon with slight pressure. The melon is not ripe if the stem has to be forcibly separated from the fruit. Other indicators of maturity are based on touch, appearance and aroma. When ripe, the flower end (the end opposite the stem) of the melon should be slightly soft. As the fruit matures, the skin between the netting turns from green to yellow. Finally, a ripe melon produces a strong "muskmelon" aroma".

"Harvest watermelons when the underside of the melon (portion resting on the ground) turns from a greenish white to a buttery yellow or cream. This color change is especially pronounced on the dark-skinned varieties. In addition, the remaining portion of the fruit loses its slick appearance and becomes dull when ripe".

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact the ISU Grundy County Extension Office at 319-824-6979.