Imported Currantworm (Currant Sawfly)

Figure 1. Late stage larvae of the imported currantworm.

Scientific Name: *Nematus ribesii* (Scopoli)

Order: Hymenoptera (Ants, Bees, Wasps, Sawflies, etc.)
Family: Tenthredinidae (Common Sawflies)

Identification and Descriptive Features: The larvae are associated with the leaves of currant and, less commonly, gooseberry. Younger stages are greenish caterpillars; in the last stage they are marked with distinct dark spots. Most often they are found along the margin of leaves and may be curled in a J-shape.

Adults are small, thick-bodied wasps usually found flying about the plants in early season, occasionally resting on leaves. Males are primarily black. The slightly larger females have a light brown abdomen.

Figures 2, 3. Adult male (top) and female (bottom) of the imported currantworm/currant sawfly.

Distribution in Colorado: An introduced species, distribution within the state is likely widespread and dependent largely on the movement of infested plant material.

Life History and Habits: The imported currantworm spends the winter in a cocoon in the soil around previously infested currants and gooseberries. The adults often begin to emerge a few weeks after leaves emerge, although they may be present into June, particularly following cool weather. Often the adults are actively flying about the plants and small swarms may cluster on leaves during periods of mating.

Females insert short rows of elongate white eggs onto the midrib of the underside of the leaves, usually picking shaded leaves in the plant interior. Eggs hatch in 1-2 weeks and the newly emerged larvae are pale green. Originally they feed in the interior of the leaf, producing small

"shothole" feeding wounds that gradually expand as the larvae increase in size. Later they move to feed on the leaf edge and the later stage larvae are marked with black spotting and yellow patches near the head. Feeding injuries can be extensive during outbreaks with entire leaves consumed except the larger veins.

Figure 4. Eggs of the imported currantworm.

Figure 5. Early stage imported currantworm larvae cutting shothole wounds in the leaf interior.

The entire larval period may be completed in a couple of weeks and the full-grown larvae drop to the ground and dig into the soil, where they form a cocoon. Most, if not all, remain dormant for the remainder of the year, and complete their development to emerge the following spring, producing a single generation per year.

Associated Insects: Larva of a moth, the currant spanworm, *Itame ribearia* (Fitch), is another insect that occasionally may be seen feeding on the leaves of currant and gooseberry. The larvae of this insect are also spotted, but are a type of inchworm with a distinctive looping walk.

Management: The imported currantworm can be a significant pest of currants. Extensive defoliation early in the season can reduce fruit yields during the current and subsequent year, and expose berries to sunscalding. Repeated injuries also weaken plants so that they may be further injured by other pests of the crop, notably currant borer (*Synanthedon tipuliformis*).

Detection of outbreaks during early stages is important in limiting damage. Early symptoms of infestation that are most readily observed are the shothole injuries made on the interior leaves by the young caterpillars.

Chemical control options are limited on currants and gooseberries. Some formulations of pyrethrins allow use on this crop and are effective for imported currantworm control. Spraying plants with a forceful jet of water may dislodge many larvae, which often will then fail to regain the plant. Larvae may also be handpicked or dislodged by shaking plants over a container for collection and disposal.