

Pieridae family

Cabbage White

Pieris rapae

Abundance in Adelaide area: Common

Flight: Throughout the year

Wingspan: m 44 mm; f 44 mm

Mature larva length: 27 mm

Accidentally introduced from the northern hemisphere, this pest species needs no further encouragement. The home gardener is faced with quite a dilemma when thinking about this species. On the one hand it is not unattractive and is often the most visible butterfly present in a garden. On the other, if anyone has any ideas about growing their own food in their garden—especially Brassicas—then it is probably one butterfly you'd prefer not to see!

Caterpillar food plant: Requires cruciferous plants containing mustard compounds, including many garden herbs and vegetables. The caterpillars eat the soft green parts of these plants.

Foreign species: Suitable garden flowering plants include Alyssum, Sea Rocket, and Nasturtium.

One of the most familiar sights in urban and suburban gardens throughout the Adelaide region, this butterfly was first noted in South Australia in the early 1940s. Originating in Europe, the butterfly has successfully colonised all areas of the world where its Brassica food plants are grown as crops.

While superficially similar to several other white butterflies, the Cabbage White can be separated from the other species likely to be seen in the Adelaide region by its smaller size. It also tends to fly in a floating, fluttering manner, unlike many of the other whites that tend to be migrating and fly in a more direct manner.



The butterfly has a white background to the upper surfaces of both wings. There is a dark grey tip to the forewing. The male has a single black spot in the center of the forewing, the female has a second spot near the basal margin of this wing. There is a further black spot at the top of the hindwing, near the outer margin.



The underside of the forewing is similar to the upper side, except that the grey tip to the wing is replaced by pale yellow. The hind wing is a uniformly pale yellow with a slight grey suffusion near the body.



The butterfly is around 44 mm across the expanded wings, though somewhat larger and smaller specimens are encountered at times.



Because of its use of agricultural crops, garden vegetables and ornamentals as food plants, this is one of the few butterfly species considered a pest. The caterpillars are commonly found by the home gardener on any member of the Cabbage family (the Brassicas) they grow, which includes cauliflower, broccoli and brussel-sprouts, as well as common weeds such as wild mustards.