

Leafhopper Guide for Garden and Landscape Plants

Symptoms to watch for:

The most obvious symptom to watch for is presence of the insects themselves. Leafhoppers come in many colors, but they are all of the same shape and are of similar size. Adults are winged, with the smaller nymphs being wingless. Leafhopper feeding is hard to detect at first, as the insects are simply sucking sap from small holes usually on the undersides of leaves. Small, whitish spots often appear on the upper sides of leaves being fed on before other symptoms become apparent. If feeding continues, leaves may become yellow or more white, and then develop brown edges. Leaves will usually be stunted and stems and leaf petioles will be shortened and are often thicker than normal. Affected leaves will often appear crinkled and may have a bronzish coloration on the upper surface. Vegetable plants will have little, if any, production while flowering plants may form fewer, smaller blooms that do not last as long as normal.

Where they come from and when to watch for them:

Most species of leafhoppers are migrants into Northeastern Wisconsin. They ride the waves of the jet stream currents from southern states in spring. Most species that are injurious to plants can be found from mid to late May in small numbers in the area. Damaging populations can build up as these migrants reproduce, causing large numbers of leafhoppers to be present during June and July, sometimes into August.

What should I do about them?

The best control method is preventing them from landing on your plants by putting a barrier netting over them. However, this is often unpractical as plants are meant to be seen and the netting would have to be on for long periods of time. Planting of leafhopper-resistant plants or varieties in chronically infected areas is a cheap, easy control method. One sci-fi looking idea is the use of aluminum foil as a mulch to disrupt the insects' ability to detect the plants.

If plant damage and leafhopper presence is confirmed, here are some options:

- ◆ Spray an insecticidal soap solution laced with isopropyl alcohol, every 2-3 days for about two weeks.
- ◆ Spray a pyrethrum solution twice, four days apart.
- ◆ Apply a 5% Rotenone dust.
- ◆ Apply Malathion or Sevin solutions, be sure to follow label directions.
- ◆ Give your kids/grandkids a penny for each leafhopper they are able to catch!
- ◆ Call the UWEX office at 732-7510 if none of these seem right for you.