Home and Horticultural PESTS

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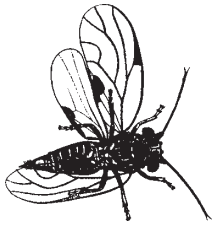
Hackberry Nipplegall Maker (Psyllids)

During autumn, homeowners with hackberry trees are often annoyed by adult psyllids (sill lids). These tiny insects, sometimes called "jumping plant lice," are dark-colored, heavy-bodied, gnat-like insects that resemble cicadas in miniature. On warm afternoons, the outdoor air becomes filled with swarms of these small, flying insects. They gather on exterior sunny surfaces, cluster on window screens, accumulate on freshly painted surfaces, and invade homes through open windows and doors.

The adult is about 1/8-inch long with four transparent wings, prominent eyes, and a body that tapers from front to rear. Psyllids overwinter wherever they can find shelter in buildings and crevices of trees, etc. The immatures develop on hackberry leaves during the spring and cause formation of the familiar nipple galls on the undersides of the leaves. Adults reach maturity and emerge from the galls in the fall just before leaf drop. Tree damage from the galls does not appear to be of serious concern.



If hackberry trees are common in your neighborhood, you will likely experience this problem from time to time. When windows are open on warm fall afternoons, these insects will come through the screens to create an indoor nuisance. Upon outdoor inspection, you may find them clustered on sides of the building nearest the trees. They will disappear when cold weather arrives, but the problem occurs each year to some extent as long as the host trees are nearby.

Control measures

Psyllid control indoors. A vacuum cleaner with hose attachment may be used to remove invading psyllids. A space spray may be applied using a household aerosol labeled for flying insects. Use a product containing synergized pyrethrins or one of the pyrethroids (various names, but they usually end with -thrin). Note, not all aerosols are intended for flying-insect control. Read and follow label directions closely.

Preventing entry. Several steps can be taken during the fall just before frost to reduce entry. Turning off outdoor night-lights and reducing the amount of light shining through night windows helps. Consider using fine mesh (18) screens on windows that are kept open. Ordinary screens are 12 mesh to the inch. Caulk or plug up cracks and crevices. Keep windows and doors closed when psyllids are active. For temporary reduction, spray exterior surfaces such as window screens, shutters and sides of buildings where psyllids are resting. Look for residual insect sprays labeled to use on outdoor surfaces. Examples of ingredients with residual action include cyfluthrin, bifenthrin, permethrin, Baygon and tralomethrin.

Spraying the nearby hackberry trees to reduce the source may be a consideration, provided there are not other untreated hackberry trees on neighboring property. Treatment of large trees may prove impractical. Timing of applications may vary with the product used. Treatment with cyfluthrin (Tempo by commercial application) should occur just before bud break. Carbaryl (Sevin), on the other hand, should be applied after the leaf buds have opened, but before nymphs have formed gall tissue; some years, this could require repeat applications.

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