

Leafhoppers and Leaf Rollers

Leafhoppers – These little pests are related to aphids in that they are suckers. There are more than 2,500 species of these small wedge-shaped insects, making them one of the largest families of plant-feeding insects. Some are quite colorful and patterned, while others blend in with the foliage. When they are disturbed, they can run sideways, or as the name implies, they hop.

While some leafhoppers feed on only one plant, others enjoy a broader diet. Plants that are noticeably affected by the leafhoppers are apple, aster, bean, beet, carrot, eggplant, grape and potato.

Adults and nymphs suck the plant juices, causing bleached or mottled leaves. Sometimes the leaves turn brown and curl up, as on the potato plant, causing a condition known as hopperburn. Some leafhoppers leave a black excrement on apples or grapes, which can ruin them (although the apples can be scrubbed or peeled). Severe infestations cause stunting and leaf drop in flowers and vegetables. Some transmit plant diseases.

The best prevention for leafhoppers is the use of row covers. Hosing will work on only the wingless nymphs. Birds, lizards, assassin bugs, and parasitic wasps are natural enemies.

Leaf Rollers – This name is given to many different species of caterpillars that roll foliage around themselves as they feed, creating shelter from predators. They are generally moth caterpillars, somewhat small and variable in color. They roll the leaves, "stitch" them together with silk, then feed within. They attack many trees, including most fruit trees.

As with the leafhoppers, some species attack only one type of plant, while others like a more varied menu. The fruit-tree leaf roller is a thin, light green caterpillar with a black dot on its head. It feeds on apple trees, aspen, buckeye, maple, oak, poplar, and willow. When probed or disturbed, they thrash about violently and try to lower themselves to the ground on strands of silk.

While leaf rollers rarely do much damage to garden shrubs, they can seriously attack fruit trees, because they feed on new growth. A severe infestation can defoliate and weaken an entire tree. Some even feed on fruit.

Adults lay their eggs on host plants. The caterpillar does the damage, so prevention must begin before this stage of the life cycle. Dormant sprays can be applied when the trees are leafless, smothering and killing any egg masses. You can pinch to kill any caterpillars inside rolled leaves. Lastly, encourage natural enemies of the caterpillars such as birds and parasitic wasps.

Resources

[Common Insects & Mites: Leafhoppers](#), Retrieved from April 5, 2004.

[Common Insects & Mites: Leafrollers](#), Retrieved April 6, 2004.

Brenzel, Kathleen N. *Sunset Western Garden Problem Solver*. Menlo Park: Sunset Books Inc., 1998.