



WHITEFLIES

Host Plants and Description

Whiteflies affect a wide variety of flowering plants and vegetables, and can be a problem on houseplants as well. They are particularly troublesome on peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, lettuce, salvia, aster, hibiscus, fuchsia, lantana, coleus, catmint and chrysanthemum. In the southern U.S., they can be found outside year-round, but they cannot winter over outside in the northern states. Summer infestations in northern gardens are the result of introduced populations from greenhouse transplants.

Several species of whiteflies exist; all are white or whitish as adults and are gnat-like in appearance. The adults are very active and will fly up in mass when disturbed. They congregate in large numbers on the underside of leaves, which is also where they lay their eggs. Young nymphs are immobile and whitish-green in color. Both adults and young feed on leaves and suck out sap.

Plant Damage / Symptoms

Plant damage will be apparent as lack of vigor and yellowing of leaves. Very severe infestations can even cause death of the plant. Leaves may be covered with sticky honeydew on which a fungus grows, causing the foliage to appear blackened or dirty.

Controls

Check plants before purchasing to be sure they are not hosting this insect. Pull weeds that might serve as alternate hosts in the garden area. Encourage beneficial predators by planting a wide variety of flowering plants. Ladybugs, lacewings, and the parasitic wasp, *Encarsia formosa*, are all natural enemies of

the whitefly. Adult whiteflies are attracted to yellow sticky traps, which can be bought or made by applying a sticky product such as Tanglefoot to yellow boards. Be sure to place the traps at plant level. Tapping at the plants will hasten the process by causing the adult whiteflies to flutter up towards the traps. If spraying becomes necessary, start first with an insecticidal soap. This treatment is effective, but must be repeated several times at weekly intervals.

If stronger chemicals become necessary, pyrethrin and resmethrin are recommended for flowers; malathion is recommended for vegetables. Again, repeat applications will be necessary.