

Pecan Spittlebug

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Distribution:

The pecan spittlebug, *Clastoptera achatina* Germar, occurs in most areas where pecans are grown. Infestations are usually cyclic and have been increasing in Louisiana the past several years.

Description and Life Cycle:

Adult spittlebugs are small, pale brown and resemble leafhoppers (Fig. 1). The immature stages or nymphs (Fig. 2) are rarely seen because they are usually covered with foamy white froth-like material (Fig. 3). The nymphs secrete these spittle masses to maintain a high humidity environment required for development and possibly for protection from natural enemies.



Photograph by Rebecca Melanson

Figure 1. Adult pecan spittlebug.



Photograph by Rebecca Melanson

Figure 2. Immature pecan spittlebugs.

These insects overwinter in the egg stage in slits in the bark of small twigs about one-half inch or smaller in diameter. In the spring, the nymphs become active and feed about the buds, tender shoots, or nutlets. In Louisiana the spittle masses start appearing shortly after bud break. The first adults of the season usually appear about mid-May. Due to their small size and rapid movement, adults are somewhat difficult to detect. Presence of numerous dried spittle masses (Fig. 4) will aid in identifying when a majority of the adults have emerged.

Other generations overlap and appear throughout the season. The generation that first appears in the spring and the following one are usually the largest. In commercial orchards the intensity of spray schedules probably contribute to the suppressed numbers of the subsequent generations.

Damage:

Information about the actual damage caused by spittlebugs is sparse. They will suck juices from the parts of the plant they attack. Heavy populations can kill terminal growth and reportedly cause small nuts to shed from the trees. If the spittle masses become large enough to cover the stigma of the nuts, pollinations may be affected.



Photograph by Rebecca Melanson

Figure 3. Spittle-mass on terminal.



Photograph by Rebecca Melanson

Figure 4. Dried spittle on nut.

Control:

Light infestations of spittlebugs do not cause sufficient damage to make control necessary, especially if feeding is confined to non-fruiting terminals. Insecticide applications can be made if five to ten percent of the nut-bearing terminals are infested. Insecticide applications should be made when spittle masses first appear. For a listing of insecticides that can be used for controlling pecan spittlebug, refer to the Louisiana Recommendations for Control of Pecan Insects. This can be found at www.lsuagcenter.com. When using insecticides be sure to check the pH of the water being used for spraying. The pH needs to be between 5.5 and 6.5 for optimum insecticide efficacy. Use of a buffering agent will help maintain the desired pH once pesticides have been added to a solution.