BUG BIZ
Pest Management and Insect Identification Series
LSU AgCenter Research & Extension

Pecan Spittlebug

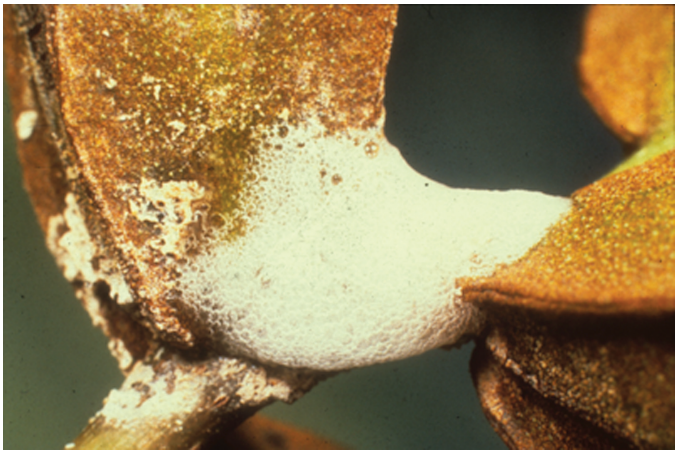
Description

The pecan spittlebug, *Clastoptera acatina Germer*, can be a serious pest of pecan in Louisiana. The adult is a pale brown colored insect, approximately 0.375 inches in length. The immature stages, or nymphs, resemble the adults, except that they are smaller and wingless. The nymphs are hidden with a white, frothy spittlemass, which serves to protect the nymphs from drying out. This spittlemass might also provide protection from natural enemies and insecticide sprays without spreader stickers or surfactants added.

Young Spittlebug Mass (Photo by Dr. Dale Pollet)

Distribution

Pecan spittlebugs are found throughout the pecan producing regions of Louisiana. The severity of infestations varies from year-to-year and from orchard-to-orchard.



Pecan Spittlebug Mass (Photo by Dr. Dale Pollet)

Life Cycle

Pecan spittlebugs overwinter as eggs within slits in the bark of small twigs. These twigs are usually 0.5 inches or less in diameter. The nymphs become active in the spring and feed around the buds, current seasons shoot growth, and nutlets. In Louisiana, spittlemasses begin to appear shortly after bud break. Only the nymphs make the spittlemass and once the adults emerge the spittlemass dries up. The presence of dried spittlemasses on the trees is a good indication that adult emergence has occurred. The first adult spittlebugs usually appear about mid-May. Adults are difficult to spot because of their small size, inconspicuous coloration, and their tendency to jump when disturbed. Following the emergence of the overwintering generation, an additional two generations of pecan spittlebug occur each year.

Pecan Spittlebug Adult (Photo by Dr. Dale Pollet)

Type of Injury

Pecan spittlebugs feed on the water conducting tissue (xylem) of the plant. They have piercing-sucking type mouthparts that they use for feeding on the plant

sap. High infestation levels can cause terminal dieback, poor nut filling, and premature nut drop. Pecan spittlebugs are known transmitters of the bacteria, *Xyllela fastidiosa* Wells et al., that causes pecan bacterial leaf scorch (PBLS), a disease that can cause severe defoliation on cultivars susceptible to this disease.

Control

Pecan spittlebugs are often kept under control when insecticide applications are made for control of other pecan insect pests. In the past, an insecticide application made specifically for control of pecan spittlebug has not been recommended. However, because pecan spittlebug is an important transmitter of the pathogen that causes PBLS, control for pecan spittlebug should be considered if spittlemasses are found on 10 percent or more of either bearing or non-bearing terminals. It is important to control pecan spittlebugs before they reach the adult stage of development, as it is the adults that are capable of transmitting the pathogen that causes PBLS from tree to tree. When using insecticides be sure to adjust the pH of the water being used for spraying to 5.5 to 6.5 to ensure maximum efficacy of the insecticide.

For the insecticides to use and proper rates to apply, consult your county agent, or the Insect Pest Management Guide which can be found at www.lsuagcenter.com. A spiral bound hard copy is available for purchase through the LSU AgCenter Online Store at www.lsuagcenter.com/online store.

Pecan Bacterial Leaf Scorch Symptoms *(Photo by Dr. Randy S. Sanderlin)*

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