



Curled Citrus Leaves

by Anne Skinner, UC Master Gardener Program

The Master Gardener office hotline receives many gardening calls from the public. We also welcome samples of your plant problems. Recently we had a sample of citrus leaves brought to the office. The tree was 5 years old with a new onset of curled leaves. The tree had been pruned and fertilized fairly recently. Two possible leaf-damaging citrus insects are Citrus leaf miner and Asian citrus psyllid.

What leaf damage should you look for?

The Citrus leaf miner is the larva of a moth, which causes leaf damage by feeding in tunnels (also called mines) on the new growth citrus leaves. When the larva pupates, it rolls the edge of the leaf around itself, creating a rolled, distorted leaf. The fruit is unaffected, and usually a mature tree can tolerate some leaf damage.

The Asian citrus psyllid sucks the plant juices from the leaves and excretes a sticky honeydew on which blackish sooty mold may grow. The adult psyllid is very small, but has the potential to carry a bacteria from tree to tree as it feeds. The resulting tree disease is called Huanglongbing (HLB). Young psyllids are called nymphs and are tiny bright yellow-orange flightless insects found on light green, tender new citrus leaves. The nymphs excrete large amounts of plant sap as honeydew or white waxy tubules that look like bits of instant noodles. The leaves become mottled yellow, twisted and curled, and shoots may die back. A tree infected with HLB will decline in health, the fruit will become distorted and bitter, and ultimately the tree will die.

Where to find more information about these pests?

Pest Notes on both of these insects are available online through the UCCE Master Gardener web site:

ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/Citrus. Pest Notes include color pictures of the insects, leaf damage, detailed symptom descriptions and solutions.

What was the actual problem in this case?

The leaves had very evident mine trails when examined with a magnifying glass. The tree was otherwise healthy and the fruit developing normally. The tree had citrus leaf miner damage. There are many natural enemies of leaf miners and a mature tree can usually withstand some leaf damage. We recommended avoidance of pruning until winter, not fertilizing the tree in late summer or fall when leaf miner populations are high, and removing water sprouts and suckers from the tree to increase light penetration and air circulation.



Asian Citrus Psyllid



Asymmetrical yellow mottling of leaves and odd shape and greening of fruit, symptoms of Huanglongbing (citrus greening).

What if you think your tree might have Asian Citrus Psyllid damage?

Call the CA Department of Food and Agriculture Exotic Pest Hotline at 1-800-491-1899.

The Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP) was first introduced to this country through backyard citrus trees obtained from countries where the pest was present. The disease HLB caused extensive damage to Florida's commercial citrus trees already. We want to protect our local citrus orchards.

How can you help prevent the spread of the Asian Citrus Psyllid?

Do not move backyard fruit, leaves or twigs from your yard. It's tempting to share fruit with family out of the area and the leaves show you grew the fruit. The psyllid is very small and its eggs are smaller, so cleaning them off the fruit and leaves is difficult. Tulare County is under a Quarantine, so all commercial fruit has to be cleaned thoroughly by the packing house prior to moving it out of the area.

Do not bring fruit, plants, seeds, wood products or soil into California unless they are Certified as pest-free or inspected by agriculture officials. This includes online purchases.

Buy only pest-free plants and trees from reputable local nurseries.

How can you reach the UCCE Master Gardener Hotline?

For the Tulare office, call (559) 684-3325 or 684-3326; for the Hanford office (559) 852-2736.

We welcome samples of your plant problem, but please package them securely in a sealed ziplock bag or container with a lid. The Tulare office is at the UC Cooperative Extension, 4437 S. Laspina St., Suite B, Tulare, CA 93274. The Kings County office is at the UC Cooperative Extension, 680 N. Campus Drive, Hanford, CA 93230.

When you call, you will be asked many questions. We need your contact information in order to be able to call you back after we do some research. We also will ask many questions about your specific plant to narrow down the cause of its problem and to have advice for treating the problem. Every time I am in the office, I learn while reviewing the UC Ag and Natural Resources information to answer your question.

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