

Leaffooted Bugs

Leaffooted bugs are medium to large sized insects that feed on fruits, fruiting vegetables, nuts, and ornamentals. They have piercing-sucking mouthparts that allow them to feed on plant parts, particularly seeds. Leaffooted bugs are in the family Coreidae and get their name from the small leaf-like enlargements found on the hind leg. They are closely related to other sucking insects; such as stink bugs that can also suck juices from plants.

Leaffooted bugs overwinter as adults, typically in aggregations located in protected areas, such as in woodpiles, barns or other buildings, palm fronds, citrus or juniper trees, under peeling bark, or in tree cracks. Cold winters kill many adults, and major outbreaks often occur after mild winters. Overwintered adults live from September/October until late spring. When weather gets warm, typically in April in the Sacramento Valley, adults disperse to find food sources. Adults are strong flyers that may feed initially on the seeds of winter weeds and later move into gardens, landscapes, and farms in search of early-season fruit and a place to lay eggs.

Leaffooted bugs have piercing-sucking mouthparts that extend more than half of the length of the narrow body. They use this mouthpart to probe into leaves, shoots, and fruit to suck plant juices. The depth of the probing depends on the size of the bug: small nymphs feed shallowly on superficial plant juices, whereas adult bugs probe deep into fruit in search of seeds. If a hard seed is found, such as an almond kernel or juniper berry, the bug excretes digestive enzymes from its mouthparts to liquefy a small part of the seed so that it can be ingested.

During most years, leaffooted bug populations are low enough that damage to gardens is tolerable and damage to landscape plants is negligible. When outbreaks occur, a variety of methods will likely be needed to manage this pest, which may include removing overwintering sites or the use of weed host removal, row covers, physical removal, natural enemies, and insecticides. Achieving good control will likely require some combination of these methods.

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