

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 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.

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.

Adult bugs overwinter in woodpiles, under the bark of eucalyptus, juniper, or cypress, and in outbuildings. Large numbers may pass the winter in culls of fruit such as pomegranates. Remove these overwintering sites where possible or inspect them for leaffooted bugs.

Weedy areas serve as a food source for leaffooted bugs during winter and spring, when fruits are not available. Try to eliminate such areas near your garden or keep weedy areas closely mowed.

Thoroughly examine plants for all stages of the pest, daily to several times per week. The bugs may be hidden inside dense foliage layers or fruit clusters, and they may hide or fly when startled. Handpick and crush the bugs or brush them off plants into soapy water. Wear gloves because of the odor they will emit when handled. It is especially important to remove the bugs as early in the season as possible, when the very young nymphs are tightly clustered together, and morning is best to reduce movement and flight. Be sure to also destroy the egg masses found on the underside of leaves.

Insecticides are rarely needed for leaffooted bug control because small blemishes on most fruit are tolerable in gardening situations and because landscape plants are rarely damaged. Also, because they are primarily seed feeders, leaffooted bugs are most common on garden plants near harvest, when the application of pesticides to fruits that are going to be consumed is undesirable. In addition, most insecticides available to homeowners only have temporary effects on the leaffooted bug. However, in severe cases, insecticides can be considered as a last resort.