Green Peach Aphid

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SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Myzus persicae* (Sulzer)
CLASS: Insecta
ORDER: Hemiptera
FAMILY: Aphididae

Description

Adults

The small adult green peach aphid is light to dark green or pink, with red eyes. Three dark lines run down its back. Wings may or may not be present. The tobacco aphid is similar and can be either red or green.

Adults and nymphs (Whitney Cranshaw, Bugwood.org)

Nymph, wingless adult, and winged adult (NC State Extension)

Eggs

Eggs are shiny and black. The tobacco aphid has not been found to have an egg stage.

Nymphs

The wingless nymph resembles the larger adult.

Biology

Host Plants

Green peach aphids have been collected from over 100 plants, including a wide variety of vegetable and ornamental crops. Spinach, potatoes, and peaches (the host on which eggs are laid) seem to be especially favored hosts. Tobacco aphids will be pests primarily on tobacco and closel related plants such as flowering tobacco and Nicotiana. It is probably not a major pest but will feed on pepper and eggplant as well as cole crops such as turnips, kale, and collards.

Damage

Aphids suck plant sap and contaminate the host with honeydew and cast skins. Some hospitals refuse to allow cut flowers in patients' rooms because of the mess by aphids. They are also the vectors of a number of plant viruses including tobacco, tomato, lettuce, dahlia, canna, and bee mosaics as well as tuber spindle, rugose mosaic, and leaf roll diseases of potato.

Life Cycle

In the northern United States, green peach aphids overwinter as eggs, but in the Southeast, no eggs are laid. Instead, female aphids give birth to young females during the growing season. The reproductive capacity of green peach aphids has been described as "fantastic." High reproductive rates and resistance to pesticides make the green peach aphid a formidable pest in the greenhouse. Up to 30 generations per year may take place in this pest's southernmost range.

The tobacco aphid most likely overwinters on weed hosts or on cole crops that remain alive through the winter. Tobacco aphids are not known to have an egg stage, and the reproduce by giving birth to live young female aphids without mating. Their young are able to produce young as well without mating. If the plant becomes too crowded or if it becomes late in the season and the aphids need to find a winter host, the aphids give birth to young that will grow up to have wings and can move to other plants. Differences on reproductive rates exist between the red and green forms of the tobacco aphids. The red form can reproduce much faster during extremely hot weather than the green form.

On chrysanthemums, green peach aphids feed on all parts of the plant (melon aphids feed only on the buds and leaves, and chrysanthemum aphids feed only on the stems and leaves). Green peach aphids will not become established in the presence of the other two aphids unless pesticides are applied. In that case, green peach aphids outlive both melon aphids and chrysanthemum aphids.

Management Strategies

Because green peach aphids overwinter on weed hosts, infestations can occur in the greenhouse any time of year. Green peach aphids readily infest bedding plants and can be introduced into greenhouses whenever bedding plants are brought in from another grower. Although damage per aphid is often not serious, these aphids reproduce so rapidly that serious harm can be done in a short time.

Biological Control

Ladybugs, lacewings, syrphid flies, damsel bugs, wasps, and parasitic fungi tend to regulate green peach aphid populations outdoors.

Pesticides

These aphids' resistance to pesticides calls for thorough applications whenever a new infestation is found. Tobacco aphids can be controlled in the same manner as green peach aphids.

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