

CONTROLLING THE GIANT WHITEFLY INFESTATIONS

by Philip Lee

(Prepared with information supplied by the L.A. County Agricultural Commissioner's Office)

If you've ever noticed your shrubs and vines covered with a fine, white, furry web, or if you've ever seen very small delicate bone- white flies flitting through your garden, then chances are that you have actually seen the Giant Whitefly (*Aleurodicus dugestii*) which is becoming a nuisance pest of great significance.

HOW BIG IS THIS PROBLEM?

The Giant Whitefly was first detected in San Diego County in 1992 and began making its first appearance in Franklin Hills in 1996. It infests over 68 recorded hosts' including hibiscus, mulberry, begonia, ivy, jasmine, ficus, banana, sage, and bird of paradise. It has since spread to citrus, plum, avocado, and apricot as well. It is extremely invasive and spreads rapidly from plant to plant and then from garden to garden. Last year the entire foliage of mature trees in Franklin-Hills were covered with Giant Whitefly colonies.

The damage these pests inflict are twofold. Direct damage is caused as the larvae and nymphs collect in lacy web-like

colonies on the leaves of shrubs and trees. As the whiteflies consume the green leaves and suck the plant sap to grow, the plant loses water and nutrients. If the number of whitefly per leaf is great enough, the plant is weakened, loses its leaves and may even die. Indirect damage from the Giant Whitefly is caused by its feeding process. As the whitefly eats, it secretes a sugary solution called honeydew which fosters the growth of a black sooty mold fungus that is not only unsightly, but interferes with the plants photosynthetic process.

What can we do to control this nasty pest?

DON'T USE PESTICIDES

Regrettably, no known natural predators or pesticides exist to control the spread of this insect. In fact, since the Giant Whitefly quickly recovers and large doses of pesticide will only destroy helpful insects that are beneficial to the garden, the L.A. County Agricultural Commissioner's Office urges home owners to refrain from the use of chemical pesticides.

PRUNING

If a plant has white furry hair- like filaments collecting on its leaves, your best

strategy is to selectively prune the affected areas. On plants that are less susceptible to (Giant Whitefly (like yellow or white hibiscus or bougainvillea) this pruning technique should be sufficient to control the problem. Be sure to enclose the infested foliage in a plastic garbage bag, because infested prunings left exposed will have the opportunity to spread to other plants.

USE A STRONG JET OF WATER FROM A HOSE

On host plants where the white fly thrives (like giant bird of paradise, red hibiscus, sage, and xylosma) forceful spraying of the underside of the leaves will knock down populations of the pest. This 'syringing' technique might be required as often as once a week if the infestation is severe, but it is the only known way to control the problem.

EVERYONE OF US NEEDS TO DO OUR PART

Since the Giant Whitefly is so invasive, we all need to keep vigilant and do our fair share of pruning and syringing to keep this problem under control. Early detection and treatment is our best defense.

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