

Ficus Whitefly Update from Mike Dahlgren

As I look around our beautiful City it is disturbing that so many of our Ficus are beginning to succumb to the Whitefly. The experts are still observing and recommendations are beginning to change.

The first change seems to be that spraying has not been successful. I believe it is because the prime habitat of the insect is on the lower side of the leaf making contact by spraying very difficult. Using systemic sprays is apparently not as effective as soil applying insecticides. This latter method allows greater concentrations of the chemical to enter the plant and achieve longer-term control. Many treatments to date have involved applying a granular insecticide to the soil around the plants. The chemical then enters the roots and moves up through the plant to the leaves. Many applications I have observed have not been very effective. I suspect this is due to not enough water being applied to the soil where the granules were applied to thoroughly "dissolve" the chemical. With two times per week watering, and being extremely dry, it seems results may have been less than expected.

There are not any new options for homeowner applications. I doubt there will be any additional methods approved in time to help. Current recommendations are for the preparation of a slurry to drench the soil with imidacloprid. This is probably best done by a commercial applicator as they have a wider availability of chemicals. If you do decide to attempt this yourself be sure to apply at the labeled rate and use plenty of water for granular materials. Remember not to spray and drench with the same ingredient as resistance will occur.

I am going to attempt to start posting information on the Web Site. I have to work out the details with City Management, but I think this would be the best way to update information as it becomes available. Additionally, I will list some alternatives that might be used should one chose to replace their Ficus.

Lastly a quick reply to those that have questioned the use of Imidacloprid. Yes, it is the chemical that the beekeepers are suspecting is causing "rapid colony collapse". I believe it is safe on Ficus when used as a soil application. Ficus don't have any bee attracting properties so there should be no problem from contaminated nectar and pollen.

Good luck