Whiteflies in Palm Beach County ~ Introduction
University of Florida / IFAS
Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service

Fact Sheet #1 in a series brought to you through the efforts of the Palm Beach County Whitefly Task Force
Task Force Website: http://www.pbcgov.com/coextension/horticulture/whitefly/
Whitefly Blog Archives: http://palmbeachcountyextension.wordpress.com/category/whitefly/

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INTRODUCTION

You've probably heard about the whitefly issue in Palm Beach County, even if you haven't dealt with it personally. This article is brought to you as part of a series provided by your Palm Beach County Whitefly Task Force, an educational initiative developed to give you the most current, accurate information available.

Whiteflies can be concerning because some may significantly affect certain landscape plants. If proper management steps are taken, a healthy landscape can be maintained. There are a number of cultural, biological and pesticide strategies that can be effective to help manage whiteflies.

The great thing about living in a subtropical climate is that we have an active, year-round growing season and can enjoy landscape plants that are shipped from around the world. Sometimes, however, new insects are unintentionally introduced to South Florida. This isn't a new phenomenon but does seem to be an ever-increasing problem. New pests have a good chance at thriving here due to our mild climate and lack of cold winters. Further, there are generally no or few natural enemies here that will feed on the new pests. Keep in mind that nature often finds a way to achieve equilibrium. An insect will have many natural enemies in its native habitat. In a new habitat, natural insect enemies may slowly emerge and control pest populations without human intervention.

There are more than 75 whitefly species in Florida, and many more around the world. Three introduced whiteflies of particular concern here in Palm Beach are from Central America and the Mediterranean. We are most interested in the ficus, silverleaf, bondar's nesting, and rugose

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spiraling whiteflies. Although these whiteflies are similar, there are differences in their size, the plants they attack and damage they cause. The ficus, bondar's nesting, and silverleaf whiteflies are very tiny. You may struggle to make out the adults. The rugose spiraling whitefly is about three times bigger than the other two, and is much easier to see without a magnifying lens.

HOSTS~

Ficus Whitefly. The ficus whitefly feeds only on ficus trees and shrubs. It feeds on many of the commonly planted ficus in our landscapes. The biggest concerns in Palm Beach County include Weeping Fig (Ficus benjamina) and Banyan. The Edible Fig, Green Island Ficus, and Ficus religiosa (Boddhi Tree) do not appear to be affected.

Silverleaf Whitefly. The silverleaf whitefly has an extremely broad host range of more than 500 different plants, which includes a number of vegetables, commercial row crops, and ornamentals. The main landscape plant of concern is hibiscus.

Rugose Spiraling Whitefly. This whitefly has a broad host range. Particular favorites of this pest in Florida include Gumbo Limbo, Adonidia Palm, Coconut Palm, Black Olive, to name a few.

Bondar's Nesting Whitefly. This new whitefly has a fairly broad host range. The wax it forms is nest-like in character. Groups of these "nests" look like polka dots on a plant.

LOCATION ~ Both the silverleaf and ficus whiteflies are well established throughout Palm Beach County. The rugose spiraling whitefly is still relatively new and is well established all along the eastern portions of the county and is gradually moving westward.

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