Psyllids

Psyllids are aphidlike insects that secrete sticky honeydew.

Some species produce white wax, distort leaves and shoots, stunt plant growth, or cause defoliation. Management includes providing proper plant care, conserving natural enemies of psyllids, and applying low-toxicity insecticides when needed. Most plants can tolerate low to moderate numbers of psyllids.

Plants commonly affected include:

- Acacia, boxwood, eucalyptus, eugenia, pepper tree, and some other ornamentals
- Pear, potato, and tomato

Damage resembles that from some aphids, scale insects, and whiteflies. Look for:

- Abundant sticky honeydew that psyllids excrete as they suck plant sap
- Black sooty mold growing on the honeydew
- Curly or powdery wax or, in certain species, crystallized covers called “lerps”
- Distorted or galled leaves or shoots or prematurely dropping foliage

Learn to recognize psyllids.

- Adults are ¼ to ½ inch long and hold their wings rooflike over their bodies.
- Adults are quite active, often jumping away when disturbed.
- Nymphs are flattened and oblong to round. Some can move, but pit-making species remain stationary.
- Nymphs of several species that feed on eucalyptus are hidden under hardened covers (lerps).

What about pesticides?

- Don’t treat plants with insecticides unless you have an intolerable psyllid infestation.
- Avoid insecticides that injure natural enemies. Common natural enemies of psyllids include lady beetles, pirate bugs, and parasitic wasps.
- If you must treat, select insecticidal soaps, oils, and other least-toxic products, or use a soil-applied systemic insecticide for especially intolerable problems. Systemic insecticides may be toxic to honey bees and other beneficial insects so avoid using them during bloom.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.