

Ash Whitefly in Home Gardens

The following fact sheet is intended to assist home gardeners with controlling ash whitefly.

Lifecycle and Description

Ash whitefly (*Siphoninis phillyreae*) was first described in Adelaide in 1998, and is now found in many parts of southern Australia. It is difficult to distinguish from other whitefly species, even for trained horticulturists.

Ash whitefly attacks a range of ornamental trees (including ash trees, hence its common name), whereas the greenhouse whitefly is more likely to be found on smaller plants. Under high infestations, a wide range of plants will be attacked by both pests.

Ash whitefly has up to three generations per season. Eggs are laid on the underside of leaves, and young whiteflies are largely immobile. Winged adults move easily between hosts. Adults overwinter on evergreen hosts.

Damage

Ash whiteflies feed on the sap in leaves, and produce huge amounts of honeydew on which the black 'sooty mould' develops. This direct feeding and sooty mould can be so bad as to defoliate trees by late summer or autumn. Other problems can be caused by sooty mould covering cars, garden furniture, paths etc situated under infested trees.

Control Options

Chemical control is extremely difficult on large trees, due to coverage. Chemicals with some systemic properties can give better results, but even these generally fail to provide even short term relief from infestation.

There is a lack of natural controls, with no significant parasites in Australia. Encarsia supplied by Bug Central for greenhouse whitefly is not effective against ash whitefly.

A number of customers have used green lacewings to help control ash whitefly. Lacewings feed on the whitefly eggs and larva, but control has been variable, ranging from

good control through to no obvious decrease in whitefly numbers.

Lacewings are unlikely to be a suitable strategy for commercial situations.

An Integrated Approach

Here are suggestions on improving control of whitefly in home gardens using an 'integrated' approach, including with green lacewings.

1. Timing:

The extent of the problem when control is applied is critical. If huge numbers of whitefly are already present, then control will be ineffective, whether using chemicals or lacewings. Releasing lacewings early in the pest's lifecycle is better. Keep a close watch for any activity, and release lacewings early.

2. Release Strategy:

Multiple releases of larger numbers of lacewings are likely to get better results. Ash whitefly can build up rapidly, and will have many ants attending them, which make the job of the lacewings even more difficult.

We suggest a 'large garden' release at least twice. Placing the lacewings in the region of the foliage is important, which can also be difficult in larger trees.

3. Other Options:

For heavy infestations, a combination of sprays and lacewings may help. However, if a tree is repeatedly infested and defoliated each season, the fact is that it may not be possible to achieve control. Whilst it is a difficult decision to make, removal of highly susceptible trees may be the only solution.

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