

TREE PEST OF THE MARIANAS



Photo by Donald Nafus

Common Name: Woolly whitefly

Scientific Name: *Aleurothrixus floccosus* Maskell (Homoptera:Aleyrodidae)

Biology: The eggs are laid on young leaves, and hatch in about a week. There are four nymphal stages lasting a total of 15 days or more depending on the weather. The immatures produce large quantities of wax which gives the whitefly populations an appearance similar to fluffy wool. They pierce the undersides of leaves with their mouthparts and suck on the juices. They excrete large quantities of honeydew.

Damage: The honeydew provides a media for the growth of sooty mold organisms. The sooty mold can build up to a heavy crust, which can interfere with pruning and harvesting operations. Heavy infestation of whiteflies can cause premature leaf drop and defoliation in citrus.

Crops affected: Citrus, guava and surinam cherry are some of the hosts of this whitefly.

Distribution: This insect is native to the tropical and subtropical America. It was accidentally introduced to North Africa and southern Europe in the 1970's. It spread to California in mid-sixties, then to Hawaii and Guam in the early eighties.

Control: Several effective parasites are known. One was apparently introduced to Guam with the whitefly. It seems to have the ability to clear up infestations, though it may not be effective all year around. Trees can be treated with white mineral oil. Good penetration of the crown and good coverage of lower sides of leaves are essential to provide control of the whitefly. Most insecticides are very toxic to the parasites and should be avoided unless severe damage is occurring.

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