

LYGUS BUGS Hemiptera: Miridae *Lygus* spp.

DESCRIPTION

Adults are 6 to 7 mm long, winged, and marked with a "V" shaped or triangular mark on the back just in front of the wings. Color ranges from light green to shades of brown or black. **Nymphs** are about 1-6 mm long, wingless, green or yellow-green, with a varying number of black spots on the back.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

Adult and nymph lygus bugs are one of the most serious insect pests on alfalfa grown for seed, but also feed on vegetable crops grown for seed such as radish, carrot, and others. *L. hesperus* and *L. elisus* are the most abundant and damaging species. Feeding blasts the buds, causes the flowers to drop, and kills the seeds. If feeding occurs on immature seeds, the seeds may shrivel, become discolored and fail to germinate. Lygus bugs also feed on developing flower buds of apple and pear and cause "catfacing" on peaches and apricot. Lygus adults and nymphs also damage potatoes, sugarbeets and other vegetable crops by directly feeding on plant juices.

DISTRIBUTION AND LIFE HISTORY

Lygus bugs are found throughout the United States and southern Canada. These insects overwinter as adults in trash in waste areas, along field margins and road edges. Overwintering adults are frequently associated with weeds such as yellow starthistle, Russian thistle, wild radish, and wild mustard. Adults become active in the spring and disperse into plant hosts in late May and early June. Adults mate and females begin laying eggs in plant stems. Eggs hatch in one to three weeks into nymphs that feed on plant juices for two to three weeks before molting to the adult stage. There are usually three or four generations each year in the northwest.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

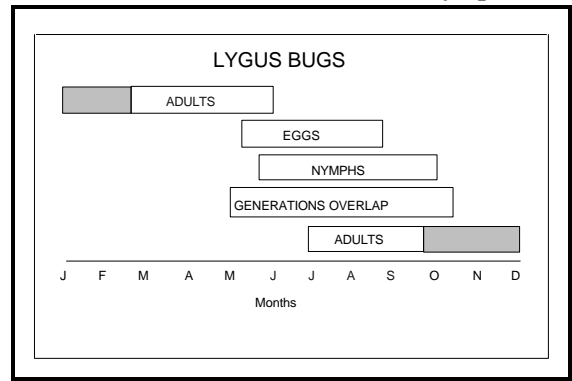
It is important to check fields for the presence of lygus nymphs in May and early June to determine whether or not insecticide treatment is necessary. Treatment is justified when adults and nymphs are present during the prebloom period. If an application is necessary, apply on warm days in late May. Be sure no blooming weeds are present in the field to avoid killing bees. A second application may be necessary during bloom (prior to Aug. 15) usually when adults and nymphs average 2 to 3 per sweep but before nymphs reach the third instar.



Lygus bug adult



Late instar nymph



The first three instars do little damage, but are the only stage that can be controlled during bloom. Before using any insecticide, it is important to carefully consider the impact on pollinators. See the Pacific Northwest Insect Control Handbook for a list of registered insecticides and their toxicities to bees. In orchards, avoid alfalfa cover crops to reduce the lygus population. Predators such as bigeyed bugs and damsel bugs are important natural enemies, and if care is taken to use only recommended insecticides at the proper time, they can help regulate the lygus population. [Return to Insect List](#)