

Farmer Fact Sheet 26: Sweet Potato Flea Hopper



What is it?

The flea hopper is an insect that feeds on sweet potato leaves. It also feeds on beans, cabbage, cucumber, pumpkin and watermelon. The scientific name is *Halticus*.

What damage does it do?

The adults and young have piercing/sucking mouthparts. They use these to suck juices from the leaves. Small whitish spots appear where they feed. As the number of insects grows, the spots develop into patches and the whole leaf may become grey or silver (photo, left).

How do I identify it?

Look for white dots on the top and bottom of the leaves, and black dots, which are the droppings. Look for the small black insects (photo, right) with large back legs and long antennae. When disturbed, they move rapidly under the leaf or they jump.

How do I manage the flea hopper?

Cultural control:

- Do not take vines for planting where populations of flea hoppers are high. Eggs of the flea hopper are laid in the stems;
- Keep gardens free from weeds, as the flea hopper also breeds on them.

Chemical control:

- Use plant-derived pesticides, such as pyrethrum or derris, as they are natural insecticides and do not last long in the environment;
- Or use synthetic pyrethroids, such as lambda cyhalothrin or permethrin. See MAL extension staff for advice.