

## Grasshoppers and leafhoppers in the foothills

By Maxwell Norton, Mariposa County Cooperative Extension

Early summer, as the native rangelands dry up, various species of grasshoppers, leafhoppers and other foliage feeders will migrate towards streams, homes and towns – anyplace with green foliage. In some years, this migration can be very large and result in significant damage to gardens, landscapes and even paint. There are over 200 species of grasshoppers in California. The “valley grasshopper” and the “devastating grasshopper” are the two species most likely to be a pest. Wet springs that generate an abundant food supply can lead to very high populations.

Completely controlling a pest coming in from another source is almost impossible. Aerial spraying the rangelands might be effective but costly and there may be environmental impacts that would have to be mitigated. Adult grasshoppers can fly several miles in a day so containing them to an area is not possible.

The best we can do is try to control what is under our control. Control measures will have to be repeated every few days as new populations move in. Grasshoppers and leafhoppers are susceptible to a variety of common insecticides. Experiment with the products that you have on hand. Read the labels to make sure you are using the appropriate material and using it in a safe way.

When treating a plant that will be eaten like fruits or vegetables, read the label carefully to make sure it is approved for that use and that you stop treating the prescribed number of days prior to harvesting. The crop must be on the label – be it for gardens or agriculture.

To reduce the amount of treatments to your garden and yard you may be able to utilize a trap crop. Provided you have enough space, plant something that is green and attractive 100 feet or more in the direction where the insects migrate from. A long strip is ideal. The strip can consist of grasses, alfalfa, or some other plant that you can irrigate and keep green throughout early summer. Hopefully, many of the insects will land there first and you can repeatedly spray that strip with an insecticide to reduce the population. Check for the availability of insecticidal baits that contain carbaryl and can be placed on the border of the property.

Most grasshoppers only have one generation per year and will disappear eventually. They prefer young, green plants, especially lettuce, beans, corn, carrots, onions, and some annual flowers. Squash and tomatoes are less attractive but they will feed on almost anything green if they are hungry enough. A compact garden can be protected with a screening material of some type. Chickens and other birds like to eat grasshoppers and can provide some control. Reducing their feed will make them more aggressive at hunting insects.

Questions about your individual gardens and yards can be directed to the Mariposa County Master Gardeners at 966-7078. In the Greeley Hill to Don Pedro areas you can

call our GH office Saturdays at 878-3209. Lots of good information is available at [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu) - select "Homes, gardens, landscapes"