

EXOTIC PEST FACT SHEET 5

Tarnished Plant Bug (*Lygus lineolaris*)



What is it?

The tarnished plant bug is an insect that prefers to feed on buds, flowers, young developing fruit, or plant terminals so they can cause economically important damage at relatively low density.

What are the main hosts?

The main hosts are celery, cauliflower, beans, potato and corn. It is also associated with dill, asparagus, beetroot, cabbage, cucumber and carrots.

What do they look like?

Tarnished plant bug adults are bronze to dark brown with a diamond shape area on the back where the wings cross. They are about 6 mm long, oval in shape, with white marks or lines behind the head and sometimes along the front wing (Fig 1). Young nymphs are a yellowish-green oval insect. Older nymphs have four round black dots on the back and one on the abdomen (Fig 2). Eggs are cream-coloured and flask-shaped, with a flattened edge. They are very small (1 mm) and are laid in plant tissue with the end of the egg visible (Fig 3).

Why are they an issue?

Tarnished plant bug adults feed by sucking sap from plants and when feeding are thought to inject a toxic substance (possibly digestive enzymes) into the plant to break down plant tissues. They become active very early in the spring. Because they feed on buds, flowers, young developing fruit, or plant terminals this can kill the buds, scars can develop on the fruit, in addition to causing other symptoms listed in the next section.

What should I look for?

Typical symptoms caused by the Tarnished plant bug include:

- abortion of young fruit or buds
- deformation of fruit
- necrosis near the site of feeding
- damage to seeds
- reduced or deformed vegetative growth including tip die-back
- on cauliflower, a bronzing on the head results from feeding on many individual flower buds.

How do they spread?

Tarnished plant bug eggs can be transported over long distances in the leaves of host plants. Adults and nymphs can also be carried long distances on contaminated plant material. Adult tarnished plant bugs spread short distances by flying.

Where are they present?

Tarnished plant bug is present in North and Central America.



Fig 1. Tarnished plant bug (adult)
Image: Russ Ottens, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

How can I protect my industry?

Check your production sites frequently for the presence of new diseases and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common pests and diseases of your industry so you can recognise something different.



Fig 2. Tarnished plant bug (nymph)
Image: Scott Bauer, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org



Fig 3. Tarnished plant bug (egg)
Image: Scott Stewart, University of Tennessee, Bugwood.org