

EXOTIC PEST FACT SHEET 7

Black Bean Aphid (*Aphis fabae*)

What are they?

Black bean aphids (also known as black fly) mainly cause plant damage from direct feeding, particularly in broad beans and beetroot. Virus transmission by Black bean aphid is of relatively minor economic importance for affected crops other than beetroot.

What are the main hosts?

Black bean aphids are polyphagous pests associated with a large variety of vegetables including Alliums, asparagus, beans, beetroot, Brassicas, broad beans, capsicum, celery, cucumber, fennel, globe artichoke, lettuce, maize, melons, parsnip, peas, potatoes, pumpkin, spinach, and tomatoes.

What do they look like?

Adults are about 2 mm long with a small head and bulbous abdomen (Fig 1). Colour ranges from dark olive green to black. They sometimes have white flecks on the upper surface of their body. Legs are a light colour with black 'knees and ankles'. They have two black, backward pointing abdominal tubes called cornicles. They may be with or without wings (Fig 2).

Why are they an issue?

Black bean aphids have piercing and sucking mouthparts. This means they suck sap from stems and leaves and cause distortion of the shoots, stunt plants and reduce yield. Black bean aphids excrete a substance called honeydew which encourages the growth of sooty mould which can spoil crops. Heavy infestations may reduce seed formation and cause plants to die. Black bean aphids may also transmit viruses. Black bean aphid populations can increase rapidly in favourable conditions resulting in rapid exploitation of host plants.

What should I look for?

Symptoms of black bean aphid include leaf curling, distortion and wilting especially on young actively growing leaves (Fig 3). Leaves may also yellow and wilt, along the edges first. Aggregations of black bean aphids may develop on soft shoot tips, flower stems and the underside of younger leaves. There may also be white skin casts associated with infestations. The presence of sooty mould and ants are often associated with black bean aphids.

How do they spread?

The black bean aphid can be carried on planting material and some vegetables. The main method of dispersal is through migratory flight. Black bean aphids overwinter on a primary host, *Euonymus europaeus* (spindle plant), before moving to a secondary host to complete their life cycle. Secondary hosts are often the crops listed above. Female black bean aphids are able to reproduce without mating during some parts of the year.

Where are they present?

Black bean aphids are widely distributed in many parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America as well as the Caribbean islands of Saba and Puerto Rico.



Fig 1. Black bean aphids (*Aphis fabae*) - Two wingless adults and a nymph.
Photo: Alvesgaspar (Joaquim Alves Gaspar)



Fig 2. *Aphis fabae* – winged adult.
Photo Hullé M., Turpeau E., Chaubet B., 2006. Encyclop'ahid, INRA, <http://doi.org/10.15454/1.4333379890530916E12>



Fig 3. *Aphis fabae* – damage of spinach leaf.
Photo Hullé M., Turpeau E., Chaubet B., 2006. Encyclop'ahid, INRA, <http://doi.org/10.15454/1.4333379890530916E12>

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.