

EXOTIC PEST FACT SHEET 9

Flea Beetles (*Epitrix* spp.)

What are they?

Epitrix spp. (including *hirtipennis*, *cucumeris*, *similaris*, *subcrinita*, *tuberosus* and others) are a biological grouping of flea beetles. *Epitrix* are extremely difficult to distinguish between species – even by experts.

What are the main hosts?

Epitrix spp. prefer to feed on solanaceous plants such as capsicums, eggplants/potatoes, tomatoes and. They are also known to feed on, beans, beetroot, brassica, chilli, cucumber, lettuce, maize, melon, onion, pumpkin, radish, and spinach.

What do they look like?

All species of *Epitrix* are similar. They are dark in colour, 1.5 – 2 mm long, convex and covered with short soft hair (Fig 1). The common name of flea beetle is derived from the ability of the adults to jump when disturbed. Mature larvae range in size from 1 - 5 mm long and are dirty-white coloured with a brown head.

Why are they an issue?

In potato crops major damage is caused in tubers by burrowing larvae. In vegetables the major damage is caused on the leaves by the feeding adults (Fig 2). This feeding damages plant appearance which is important for leafy vegetable crops but it can also retard plant growth or kill plants, particularly in young plants and seedlings.

What should I look for?

Adults feed on the leaves producing a characteristic 'shot-hole' pattern on leaves.

How do they spread?

The most likely method of flea beetles spreading is considered to be as pupae or dormant adults in soil associated with both host and non-host plants.

Where are they present?

The distribution of each *Epitrix* species varies but they are present mainly in North and Central America. They are also present in different countries/regions of South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

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 1. *Epitrix cucumeris* – Potato flea beetle
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Fig 2. *Epitrix* adult, and damage on eggplant.
Image: Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org