

New Problem with Pygmy Date Palms

By Kathie Carter

Pygmy date palms are increasingly affected by an insect known as the palm planthopper, *Asarcopus palmarum*, also known as the date bug. These insects are not new to California; they have been here since the 1920's and are known to infest young palms in the genus *Phoenix*. They have only recently become a noticeable problem in pygmy date palm (*Phoenix roebelenii*). The planthoppers feed on flower stalks, new tender lighter colored tissues near the petiole, and unexpanded leaves near the crown.

The adult insects are very small, up to 3 mm (0.12 inches) long, with red eyes and are brown in color. There are 5 instar stages. The insects hide and are sometimes hard to find on the plant. They seem to stay on the move when the plant is disturbed. The insects may also produce honeydew residue that attracts ants.

The symptoms of an infestation are yellow spots or blotches and speckling on the new emerging leaves. The symptoms should not be confused with potassium deficiency, which occurs on older leaves.

It is good landscape practice to thoroughly inspect plants before bringing them to and planting them on a new site. The insects are difficult to manage but can be controlled by insecticide spray treatments.

References:

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