

## Pest du Jour: Flatid Planthoppers

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The Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory has been inundated recently with samples of a seemingly mysterious plant malady. Folks throughout Oklahoma are concerned with the appearance of white, cottony material covering stems of their ornamental plants. These white masses are waxy secretions of flatid planthoppers and can decrease the ornamental value of landscape plants. However, flatids are generally not abundant enough to cause direct damage to plants, although oviposition (egg laying) punctures may kill small twigs. The most common and widespread flatid species in the southern U.S. is *Metcalfa pruinosa*. It occurs throughout the U.S. and Canada but is probably most abundant in the southern U.S. This species feeds on a wide variety of trees, shrubs, vines, and occasionally on vegetables and weeds.

**Identification and Life Cycle:** Adults are whitish gray and measure about 1/4 inch long. They are somewhat wedge-shaped, becoming narrower toward the rear end, and are covered with a white, powdery substance. Nymphs are white, somewhat flattened, and covered with long filaments of the same cottony substance they secrete at their feeding sites. Like other planthoppers, nymphs will jump readily



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David Cappaert, Michigan State University, [www.bugwood.org](http://www.bugwood.org)

when disturbed. Adults of a related species, *Anormenis septentrionalis*, are similar in shape but are pale green. Nymphs are similar to those of *M. pruinosa*.

*Metcalfa pruinosa* overwinters as an egg inside the twigs of its host plant. Eggs are scattered singly, each inserted through a slit in the bark cut by the ovipositor. Small nymphs hatch and suck sap from the stems using their piercing-sucking mouthparts. As mentioned above, they produce the white, cottony material on the stems, probably for protection. Nymphs are most common in June and July. Most have matured by mid July and adults are present into early October. There is one generation per year in Oklahoma.

**Management:** Look for masses of white material on the stems of plants and check to be sure nymphs are still present. Control is not usually warranted unless obvious damage is occurring and nymphs are still present. If control is necessary, use horticultural oil or insecticidal soap. These products are available at most garden centers and do not cause harm to predators, parasitoids, and other non-target organisms. For more information about chemical control options, contact your county extension office.

#### **References:**

Major Horticultural and Household Insects of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Circular E-918.

Johnson, W. T. and H. H. Lyon. 1991. Insects That Feed on Trees and Shrubs, Second Edition (revised). Cornell University Press.

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