



Pest e-alerts



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Insect Monitoring in Fall Planted Alfalfa

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As the end of summer approaches alfalfa growers may be in full planting mode trying to get new fields established before cold weather sets in. Generally speaking, you should seed alfalfa six to eight weeks before your area receives a killing frost. In years with adequate rainfall, late summer or early fall is typically the best time to establish alfalfa. Recent wet weather may have hindered that effort to some degree. While ground preparation, fertilization and weed control are all important components to a good stand, monitoring for insects is also a must.

Insects can begin attacking alfalfa plants at or before emergence. Frequent scouting of newly planted fields is essential to maintain insect control and promote a healthy stand. Grasshoppers, fall armyworms, cutworms, and other general feeders can infest and destroy new stands in a few days. Timely application of insecticides is the most reliable method of control. It may be advisable to spray fence lines and field borders, if grasshopper infestations are heavy.

During the fall, spotted alfalfa aphids and occasionally pea aphid populations can build on seedling alfalfa. Blue alfalfa aphids can also come into alfalfa fields in the fall and are present nearly every winter and spring. As presented in previous reports, keep in mind that threshold levels for insects, especially aphids, is much lower in seedling stands compared to established fields.

Table 1. Threshold levels (aphids/stem) on susceptible varieties of alfalfa at varying growth stages.

	Pea Aphid	Blue Aphid	Spotted Alfalfa Aphid
Seedling	5	1	1
Established < 10 "	40	10	10
Established > 10 "	75	30	30



Pea Aphid



Blue Aphid



Spotted Aphid

Fall Armyworms, cutworms, and other caterpillar pest can devastate seedling stands with as little a 1 – 2 larvae/ft². We will not get relief from fall armyworms until we get a killing frost, so keep vigilant!



Fall Armyworm



Fall Armyworm Damage

Using adapted resistant varieties and good cultural practices that encourage rapid growth provide the best controls for aphid infestations. Early detection is an important factor for any insect pest because it allows timely insecticide application before problems have gone too far. For more information and recommendations on insecticide choices in alfalfa consult OSU publication EPP 7150.

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