

Eastern Lubber Grasshopper

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Mid-Summer, late July and August, is the time that North Florida residents see the largest numbers of adult Eastern Lubber grasshoppers. The females are seeking appropriate places to lay their eggs, and their large size and distinctive markings make them easily visible. The eggs from which these grasshoppers hatched were deposited in the ground back in the spring, probably in mid to late March. After hatching, the grasshoppers have been eating their way through the garden and progressively have grown larger with each of the five molts that they go through.

Description

The lubber grasshopper is one of the most distinctive insects commonly found in the southeastern United States. The adults can be 7 to 8 cm in size (3 and one-half inches or more) with the females being larger than the males. The adults may be a yellow or tawny color with black markings (Figure 1), however, a predominantly black form with yellow markings (Figure 2) is often found in areas of North Florida. Although the adult insects have wings, they are unable to fly due to their large size. Additionally, they are not particularly adept at jumping, so most are observed walking on the ground or on plants suitable for eating. They are, however, good climbers, easily making it to the tops of plants to feed on the tender foliage.

Lubbers in the Garden

Only one generation of lubbers is hatched out each year, but the large numbers produced and their

voracious appetites make them a formidable garden pest.

Lubbers consume the foliage of numerous plant species. Their host range covers at least 100 species including shrubs, trees, herbaceous species and grasses. Amaryllis, crinum lily, canna, and daylilies are among the grasshopper's favorite food sources, and these plants are often almost completely defoliated by the voracious eaters. They are also known to eat common vegetable plants such as lettuce, beans and cabbage, causing extensive damage and crop reduction, while eggplant, tomato, pepper, celery, okra, and sweet corn are less preferred.



Figure 1. The Eastern Lubber Grasshopper can reach 3-plus inches in size.

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Lubbers are often observed in areas where weeds are common, and certain weed species like Florida beggerweed and Florida pusley are favored plants. But the insects don't limit themselves to the unwanted weeds and quickly disperse to the cultivated parts of the landscape. They also are commonly found in areas that are prone to be wet like irrigation and drainage ditches and edges of ponds and lakes.

Management

Physical capture and removal tends to be the primary control method for Eastern Lubbers. Control by the application of contact insecticides has been utilized, however, these grasshoppers have proven resistant to many chemicals and toxins.

It is interesting to note that oleander, a plant containing poisonous alkaloids, is a common food source for Lubbers. Insecticide treatments are most effective on the younger stages of development of Lubbers, making early spotting and identification important. Keeping weeds under control and keeping vegetation mowed to the appropriate height has proven useful in helping reduce the numbers of grasshoppers down.

Insecticide-treated baits have been used with some success for controlling Lubbers. The baits are placed on the ground near the plants, however, the grasshopper has been known to bypass the bait to feed on its preferred food sources.



Figure 2. The black and yellow form of the Eastern Lubber Grasshopper is sometimes observed in the North Florida area. Notice the absence of wings on this particular grasshopper, indicating that it has not molted into its fully mature form.