

False Chinch Bugs

False chinch bugs (*Nysius raphanus*) are gray with a slight yellowish tinge and are typically no more than 1/8" long. The immature nymphs are smaller and lack wings. Some people get concerned because the nymphs resemble ticks to the untrained eye.

False chinch bugs are in the order Hemiptera also known as "true bugs". They go through several nymph stages. Nymphs resemble the adults in many ways except they are smaller and lack wings. True bugs have a piercing mouthpart that resembles a straw that folds underneath the body when not using it to feed. False chinch bugs can release odorous oils similar to stink bugs. While unpleasant, it is harmless to people and animals.

Adult false chinch bugs overwinter and become active in the early growing season. Adults lay eggs where there is abundant food: usually among broadleaf weeds. False chinch bugs prefer plants in the Mustard family and they especially like London Rocket, a yellow flowered mustard that is very common in our area.



False chinch bug adults and nymphs. Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org .

One of the most striking things about them is that when they are observed, there are a lot of them - massing sometimes in incredible numbers. The adult stages are highly dispersive (they are commonly found using aerial sampling several hundred feet above ground) and their occurrence at a specific site can be sudden. Apparently, they produce an aggregation pheromone (a chemical compound that insects use for communication) that causes them to concentrate at a specific site.

Even though they may feed on some landscape plants, false chinch bugs rarely cause significant damage. Most often they will feed on landscape plants where foliage is in direct contact with the ground or turf. They will also feed on some vegetable crops where their damage can cause stunting and/or wilting. They are pests on agricultural crops such as grass or alfalfa hay, cotton, grapes, pistachio, avocado, grain, walnuts, squash, melons, tomatoes, and potatoes.

Early spring weed control is the most effective control method for false chinch bugs. If they enter the home, simply vacuum them up. Spraying is not recommended due to their ability to travel from adjacent areas and reinfest. They have limited natural predators. However, they should begin to decrease in numbers as summer approaches and the temperature rises.

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Adapted from original Backyard Gardener publications by Jeff Schalau, Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, Yavapai County

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