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Locusts in the home garden

In coming weeks home gardeners will need to keep an eye out for locusts in their lawn, garden beds or veggie patch as second-generation hatchlings of Australian Plague Locusts become *adults* and take to the wing.



While locusts can be a major threat to horticultural productivity at this time of year, by following a few well timed strategies the home gardener can minimise the damage these pests may inflict on home gardens.

What they'll eat

Locusts can eat a wide range of plants including vines, tomatoes, vegetable crops, fruit trees, lawns and many ornamental shrubs. Locusts can also cause severe stripping of leaves from a range of plants if large numbers move into a home garden and no preventative measures are taken.

So this is what you can do...

Control

Make sure you monitor your garden closely.

If your garden is invaded by *adult* locusts, the best way to save valuable plants is to screen the plants with shade cloth or fine mesh material to keep out the locusts. Just ensure the shade cloth or mesh is **not green** as that colour is attractive to the insects. Make sure the screens completely enclose susceptible plants to prevent any access by locusts.

All entrances and openings to glasshouses and greenhouses should be covered with screens to prevent locusts entering.

Spraying

The use of insecticide sprays against adult locusts can be useful in achieving quick control but reinvasion by other adults may occur. So, some specific things to consider, if you do spray:

- No insecticides are locust repellents. It is *not* effective to spray before infestation to protect plants.
- Spray early in the morning or at dusk when the adult locusts are settled on the ground.
- Some sprays can be harmful to beneficial insects such as bees or ladybirds. So avoid spraying flowering crops and late afternoon spraying is less likely to harm bees.
- Some sprays are toxic to fish. Avoid spraying near ponds and, if possible, cover them to avoid risk of accidental contamination; and
- Locusts do not usually feed at night.

Locusts' activity is driven by weather conditions. They are most active in warm, dry conditions. In windy or cold conditions they will settle.

It's possible that a third generation of locusts may occur in home gardens in autumn if invading adult locusts this summer are carrying and capable of laying eggs. Eggs laid during the summer can hatch in about two weeks and hoppers (immature locusts) will also be capable of damaging many home garden plants. However, a targeted spray of a suitable insecticide should provide good control.

Which chemicals?

Products containing maldison, dimethoate or bayrethoid (a synthetic pyrethoid) which can be used in home gardens for the control of insect pests will provide a good knockdown of locusts. But consult your local chemical reseller or garden nursery for advice regarding the most suitable pesticide for use in your specific situation.

Fact sheets on chemical use and health and safety when controlling locusts can be viewed elsewhere on these locust pages at: <http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/locust/factsheets>

Chemical application

Always read and strictly follow all current label directions before use, in particular appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (as advised under the section titled "Safety Directions" on the relevant product label) must be worn when preparing and using the spray.

In particular, don't exceed the maximum rate or frequency of application to food crops and observe restrictions.

Always wash your hands and all clothing following use of insecticides.

The period you must not use food crops including fruit trees and vegetables, after you've sprayed for locusts (the 'withholding period') must be observed at all times. Different products may have different withholding periods so always read the label before using chemicals.



Photo courtesy of APLC

The challenge

Widespread hatchings of Australian plague locusts occurred in the northern areas of South Australia and in the Riverland/Murray Mallee region during spring 2010. Survivors of that plague laid eggs and these second-generation hoppers are now turning into adults, and taking to the wing.

Major swarms of locusts could migrate to other districts, outside of where the locust hoppers originally hatched.

Swarms of flying locusts will pose a threat to horticultural and certain rural activities during summer and autumn; they may also cause damage in home gardens in rural towns and possibly even metropolitan Adelaide.

Locusts: how do they develop, when is the best time to hit them?

The lifecycle of the locust is explained in the fact sheet *The Australian Plague Locust* FS 9/10 and can be downloaded from PIRSA's website at:

http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/37667/Australian_Plague_Locust.pdf

After hatching, locust 'hoppers' go through five growth stages.

Hoppers move away from their egg beds and often concentrate into dense marching bands. These bands can vary from a few square metres up to several hectares in size. Hoppers complete their development (and become flying adults) in four to six weeks.

So, it's at the hopper stage that measures to eliminate locusts are most effective.

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