Four-Lined Plant Bugs Are Active in May

By: Stanton Gill, UME

Garden centers might receive questions about several insects active in the landscape this week. Adults and nymphs of four-lined plant bugs are feeding on perennials this week. The four-lined plant bug uses its piercing/sucking mouthparts to feed on chlorophyll. It secretes a toxin in its saliva that causes white, dark, or translucent spots on the leaves. If damage is extensive, these spots coalesce and form large blotches. Heavy damage can cause leaves to turn brown and drop. The damage is sometimes mistaken for disease leaf spots. They feed on a wide range of annual flowers and herbs, mainly in landscapes and nurseries. I have not seen them damaging plants in greenhouses. There is one generation per year so damage only occurs early in the season.

The four-lined plant bug nymphs are a bright red to orange color with black dots on the abdomen. Later instars have black wing pads running halfway down the abdomen with a yellow stripe on each wing pad; their wings are not fully developed yet. Adults are usually a greenish-yellow color with four black strips running longitudinally down the wings.

Control: Acephate or acetamiprid. You can try neem products if they are still in the nymph stage.

Phlox Plant Bug

Another question for gardens center might be about phlox plant bugs which are active on phlox in the landscape this week. Look for the yellow stippling and distorted foliage caused by this feeding. The feeding by this plant bug can stunt plants.

Control: For control, you can use any systemics (e.g. acephate).
Insect Update
Up to now in the season we have mainly had reports of spider mites and tarsenomeid mites as the major pests in greenhouses. As the weather continues to warm up, thrips pressure is increasing on greenhouse crops are still in the greenhouse at this point. With many plants in bloom now, they are producing plenty of pollen as a food source for thrips. Blue sticky cards are good for detecting adult thrips in a greenhouse. Place at least 3 – 4 cards in a 10,000 sq ft of growing area and check the cards once a week to see if the population is going up or down. Yellow sticky cards also work, but the blue ones are more attractive to the adult thrips.

Control options: For low thrips populations, you can use Azadirachtin (Aza-Direct, Azatin XL, Ecozin Plus, Ornazin, Neemix) which will help keep them suppressed. The insect growth regulator, Pedestal (Novaluron), is another good option for immature stages of thrips and works best when populations are relatively low. You can also use Pylon (Chlorfenapyr) or Spirotetramat (Kontos). Kontos is both foliar and root absorbed. Kontos is phloem-active, meaning users can foliar-apply (spray) and be assured that the active ingredient (spirotetramat) will move down in the plant. Growers can also soil drench Kontos, and because it is xylem-active, the active ingredient will move up systemically through the roots to the growing tips.

Upcoming Conferences
Greenhouse Tour and Picnic
June 25, 2015
Location: Greenstreet Growers, Lothian, MD

Alternative Crops for Greenhouse Production Conference
August 5, 2015
Location: Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, MD