

Leaf-footed Bug

By Nancy Shafer, Fort Bend Master Gardener

Leaf-footed bugs of several species are seen in Fort Bend County gardens in the spring and summer and gardeners may find them damaging tomatoes or other plants. They have the distinguishing characteristic of having a leaf shaped area on their hind legs. In early fall and on warm days in winter, adult leaf footed bugs in the genus *Acanthocephala* may be seen crawling on houses, garages and garden sheds or flying slowly making a menacing sound. These adult insects are searching for a protected place to overwinter. They may find a place in or near structures, in the thick growth of shrubs or in weedy, overgrown areas.

Leaf-footed bugs are in the Order Hemiptera (true bugs) and are related to stink bugs and to the large wheel bug among other true bugs. The wheel bug is about the same size with no leaf shaped structure on its hind leg. It is a predator of leaf-footed bugs and other harmful insects. (Check out Order Hemiptera.)



Leaf-footed Bug. Photo credit: Nancy Shafer



Wheel Bug (Good Bug). Photo credit: Nancy Shafer



The piercing sucking mouthpart is held under the body when not in use and is present from small nymph through adulthood. Photo credit: TexasInsects.tamu.edu

The life cycle of the leaf-footed bug begins in the warmer weather of spring when the female lays eggs in a long brown chain on plants or structures. When a gardener discovers these eggs and small nymphs, they should destroy them to help reduce the number of adults later in the gardening season.

Life Cycle of the Leaf-footed Bug



Newly hatched nymphs and eggs.
Photo credit: Bill Ree, Texas A&M
AgriLife Extension



Older nymphs. Photo credit:
Nancy Shafer



Late-stage nymphs beginning to
show more adult characteristics.
Photo credit: Nancy Shafer

Young leaf-footed nymphs are red with black legs and quite small. They stay in a group after hatching and use their piercing-sucking mouth parts to feed on plant juices from tender leaves and stems. As they grow, they disperse among plants and continue to feed on tender leaves as well as fruit, and nuts such as tomatoes, bean pods, pecans and ornamentals. In 5 to 8 weeks, they will reach adulthood. Two or three generations a year may be produced.

To control leaf footed bugs, monitor gardens early in the growing season. Wear gloves to keep the “stink” off hands and brush the bugs into a cup of soapy water. Some gardeners make them “wider” under their shoe. Clean up weedy areas near garden bed and plant debris under garden plants. Natural enemies are assassin bugs, spiders and predatory stink bugs.

References

Leaf-footed Bug link

[The Stink on Leaf-footed Bugs | Brazoria \(agrilife.org\)](https://www.agrilife.org/leaf-footed-bugs)

[Leaf-footed bug \(tamu.edu\)](https://www.tamu.edu/leaf-footed-bug)

Assassin bug and Wheel Bug link

[Wheel bugs and other assassin bugs - Insects in the City \(tamu.edu\)](https://www.tamu.edu/wheel-bugs)