

Garden Scientists: Insects

Schyler Thibodeaux, LSU AgCenter, Assistant Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent

Have you ever wondered who else lives in your garden? Look closely and you'll discover a whole tiny world busy at work! Some insects hop, some crawl, some munch on leaves and some even make sticky "honeydew."

This guide will help you become a garden scientist. You'll learn how to spot key insects, what clues they leave behind and how to understand the busy life happening all around your plants. Grab your magnifying glass, put on your explorer eyes and let's start our adventure in the garden!

COMMON TYPES OF INSECTS

Beetles (chewers)

Beetles are like little tanks of the insect world.

- They have hard shells on their backs.
- They chew on leaves, flowers and vegetables.
- They may leave behind round holes or skeleton-like leaves.
- Examples you see in gardens include cucumber beetles, ladybugs and Japanese beetles.

Think of beetles as strong, crunchy bugs with jaws made for munching.

Caterpillars (hungry baby butterflies/moths)

Caterpillars are larvae, which means they are baby insects that will grow up to be butterflies or moths.

- They have soft, squishy bodies.
- They have lots of legs that help them inch along.
- They chew big bites out of leaves.

Caterpillars are the big eaters of the garden. If you see chewed edges, a hungry caterpillar may have visited.

Grasshoppers (big jumpers)

Grasshoppers are the athletes of the garden.

- They have huge back legs for jumping.
- They chew leaves, especially the edges.
- They can be green, brown or gray.
- They move fast and can hop away before you even get close.

Grasshoppers are super jumpers that nibble around the edges of plants.

Piercing-sucking insects (juice drinkers)

These insects don't chew leaves. Instead, they sip plant juice as if they are drinking from a tiny straw.

- They have a long, skinny mouthpart called a stylet that looks like a needle.
- Instead of holes or bites, they make leaves look:
 - Curled
 - Wilted
 - Sticky from a substance called honeydew, a sugary secretion they leave behind
- Examples include aphids, scale insects, leafhoppers and whiteflies.

Piercing-sucking insects are the plant juice sippers, like little bugs with built-in straws.

..... Meet Some **Garden Insects**



Spotted Cucumber Beetle

The spotted cucumber beetle is a tiny, colorful beetle that's easy to recognize by its yellow-green body covered in little black polka dots. Even though it's small — only about 1/4 inch long — it has a tough “shell” that protects its wings. These beetles love snacking on garden plants. If you see round holes in leaves, a spotted cucumber beetle may have stopped by for lunch.

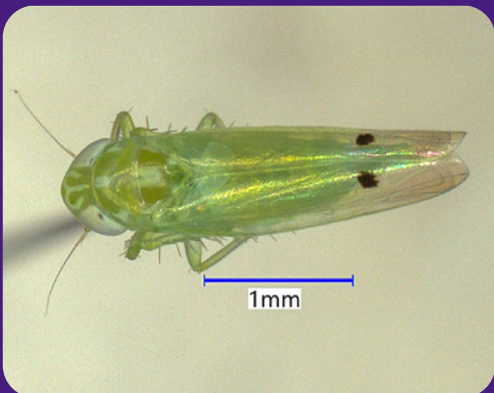
► *Photo by David Cappaert, Bugwood.org*



Scale Insects

Scale insects are masters of disguise. They don't look like bugs at all. They look like tiny flat shells or little brown bumps stuck to stems and leaves. They stay in one place and sip plant juice with their hidden mouthparts. Just like aphids, scales make sticky honeydew that can make leaves shiny or sticky. If you spot tiny dots that don't move, you may have found a cluster of scales.

► *Adobe Stock photo*



Leafhoppers

Leafhoppers are tiny, fast-moving insects that hop away the moment you get close. They can be green, yellow or even brightly colored, and they have eyes that sit far apart on their heads. Instead of chewing, they suck plant juice with a tiny straw-like mouthpart. When leafhoppers visit your plants, the leaves may look curled or faded. They're small but speedy insects to spot.

► *Photo by Isaac Esquivel, University of Florida*



Aphids

Aphids are some of the tiniest insects in the garden. They come in many colors including green, yellow, red, black or even white. Aphids drink plant juice and often gather in little groups on stems or leaf undersides. They make a sticky, shiny liquid called honeydew, which is a big clue that aphids are nearby. Look for ants too, because they love eating aphid honeydew.

► *Photo by Fangneng Huang/ LSU AgCenter*



Armyworms

Armyworms are long, striped caterpillars that can grow up to 2 inches long. They come in colors like green, brown or black, with different patterns down their backs. The fall armyworm specifically may have an upside-down “Y” on their heads. These caterpillars earned their name because they often appear in big groups that march across lawns or gardens. They love to chew big bites out of leaves and grass, leaving ragged edges behind.

► *Adobe Stock photo*



Grasshoppers

Grasshoppers are easy to spot with their big back legs that help them jump high and far. They can be green, brown, gray or even a mix of colors. Grasshoppers chew on leaves, usually around the edges, and they move fast when you try to get close. If you see leaves with uneven bites and a quick jumper hopping away, a grasshopper may be your mystery muncher.

► *Adobe Stock photo*

DON'T SEE THE BUG? SOLVE THE MYSTERY!

Look at the damage on your plant. These are some clues insects leave behind.

What do the leaves look like?

- Small round holes → Beetles
- Skeleton-like leaves → Beetles
- Chewed edges → Armyworms or grasshoppers
- Wilted, curled or yellow leaves → Leafhoppers, aphids or scale
- Honeydew → Aphids or scale

CONCLUSION

Next time you're out in the garden, take a moment to investigate these tiny critters. What clues did they leave behind? Do you see chew marks or sticky honeydew? Grab a notebook and record what you find! Draw pictures, write down colors and shapes, or sketch the damage you see. Every time you explore, you learn a little more about the amazing insect world living right beside you.

Happy exploring, garden scientists!

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Draw what you saw!

- ☐ Small, round holes in leaves
 - ☐ Big bites or chewed edges
 - ☐ Skeleton-like leaves
 - ☐ Sticky leaves (honeydew)
 - ☐ Curled or wilting leaves

☐ Other clues: _____

Date: _____