

Got Dying Ficus? A New Species of Whiteflies Infesting Ficus in Miami-Dade County

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Since the end of August 2007, we at the Extension office have been receiving calls from concerned people about ficus plants turning yellow and dropping their leaves. A new species of whitefly has been found infesting these plants.

Description and Damage: The leaves of ficus trees infested with whiteflies begin to turn yellow before the leaves drop, often in large quantities. Ficus trees without their leaves are one of the most obvious symptoms of a whitefly infestation.



Defoliated hedge

Host Plants: Weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina*). This plant is commonly used for hedges and seems to be the most susceptible host.

Other species of ficus that are hosts:

- banyan trees (*F. altissima* and *F. bengalensis*)
- strangler fig (*F. aurea*)
- Cuban laurel (*F. microcarpa*)
- banana-leaf fig (*F. maclellandii*)
- fiddle-leaf fig (*F. lyrata*)

This species of whitefly may eventually be found on other species of ficus.

To see if your ficus is infested, look on the underside of the leaves.



Immature whitefly under magnification, underside of leaf



The underside of leaves may have silvery-white tiny spots. These are the old skins of the immature whiteflies.

The adult whitefly is small and flies when your plant is touched. They look like tiny, white moths.



Adult whitefly under magnification. Note tan band across the wings.

Management (for homeowners): Monitor your ficus plants for the early signs of an infestation since it will be easier to manage the pest at this stage. If the plant has yellow leaves or has dropped all the leaves, it is too late to apply any insecticide. Wait until new growth is evident and use a soil applied systemic drench (see below).

On smaller plants:

- Insecticidal soap spray
- Horticultural oil spray (Ultra-fine oil, Organocide, Sun Spray, Neem oil, and others)

The above 2 products may be effective, but, thorough coverage of the undersides of the leaves is especially important. It will also be necessary to repeat these applications every 7 to 10 days. Spray late in the day to avoid burning the foliage.

For hedges and larger ficus:

- imidacloprid (Bayer Advanced™ Tree & Shrub Insect Control; commercial products are Merit® and CoreTect™), dinotefuran (Spectracide® Systemic Tree & Shrub Insect Control), or thiamethoxam (commercial product Meridian™) **applied to the soil.** These products are very long-lasting, lasting many months, but can not be used near water. **It is usually NOT necessary to REPEAT TREATMENT within at least 6 months of application.**

If a large number of ficus shrubs, a long hedge, or large trees need to be treated, commercial products may be less expensive. Commercial products are available through agriculture chemical suppliers. Contact your local Extension office for a list of suppliers.

At this time, avoid using foliar sprays (except for oil or insecticidal soap sprays).

When applying pesticides, ALWAYS FOLLOW THE LABEL DIRECTIONS

Defoliated ficus may still be alive. If the twigs are still supple, the plant will produce new growth in a few weeks. As soon as new growth is evident, one of the systemic insecticides mentioned can be applied to the soil to protect new growth.

To slow down the spread of this pest, **do not remove ficus clippings from your yard.** The leaves make good mulch and can be left under your plants.

Visit our website for updates and videos showing how to properly apply soil drenches

<http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu>

For additional information, please contact:
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