

Invasive Pests of San Diego County



Invasive pests are insects, plants, or other organisms that can cause economic or environmental damage and are not naturally found in a specific area. The San Diego County Department of Agriculture, Weights, and Measures works to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive pests within San Diego County in order to protect our agriculture and ecosystems. See if you can find these pests near your home and sketch a picture of them!



UC Statewide IPM Project
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Argentine Ant (*Linepithema humile*)

One of the most common ants and pests in residences and gardens, raiding homes for food and farming plant damaging insects. They outcompete native ants for resources, have many reproductive queens in one colony, colonies grow rapidly in size, make nests in a variety of habitats, have a varied diet, and colonies do not fight one another unlike other ant species.

Where to look: in soil under stones, walking in lines along the ground and on foliage, wood piles and dead trees, outside near trash or other exposed food.

Foto: Jack Kelly Clark, 2000 Regents, University of California



African-derived honey bees (formerly called 'Killer bees')

African-derived honey bees (AHB)—AKA "killer bees"—are hybrids between African honey bee (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) and European honey bee (EHB) subspecies and have established in San Diego County. Both AHB and EHB have similar appearances, sting only once, and have the same venom. AHB are extremely defensive near their hive, will sting more quickly and in greater numbers, will pursue a threat for a greater distance and swarm more frequently than European honey bees.

Where to look: On flowers in your garden - you will not be able to tell an African-derived honey bee and a European honey bee apart without specific tests.

Foto: Tyler Tkachuk



Brown Garden Snail (*Cornu aspersum*)

Originally brought to California as a food delicacy in the 1850's, they are widespread in gardens and in the agricultural industry throughout San Diego County. These snails are capable of self-fertilization, meaning they do not need to mate to produce young, and feed on a wide range of shrubs, trees, flowers, cereals, and vegetables. Large populations can cause damage to crops and gardens.

Where to look: On pavement in the early morning or after rain, in leaf litter, near moist soil, on plants and flowers.

Foto: University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources



Citrus Leaf Miner (*Phyllocnistis citrella*)

Originally from Asia and first found in California in 2000, the Citrus Leaf Miner is a species of moth which has larvae that cause damage to young citrus leaves. The larvae "mine" under the surface of young leaves, causing the leaves to curl and twist which prevents them from properly expanding as they grow.

Where to look: Look on any citrus trees near your home for curled or twisted leaves that appear shiny. Examine these leaves and see if you can spot the burrow of the Citrus Leaf Miner.

Foto: David Rosen, 2005 Regents, University of California

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Eucalyptus Leaf Beetle (*Trachymela sloanei*)

A pest of eucalyptus, this beetle was introduced to California from Australia in 2003. Eucalyptus leaf beetle adults feed on older leaves while their larvae feed on younger leaves, gnawing around the edges of leaves.

Where to look: On eucalyptus trees and leaves in your neighborhood. If the leaves are too high to reach, look around the base of the tree for fallen beetles.

Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, 2000 Regents, University of California



Russian Thistle (*Salsola australis*)

Commonly known as the “tumbleweed,” Russian Thistle is a plant long associated with the American West that is originally from Russia. Russian Thistles are a nuisance because their seeds are easily spread and contaminate seeded agricultural crops, they can be toxic to livestock, and dry Russian Thistles are known to break off and tumble into traffic or clutter up along fences and drainage ditches, becoming potential traffic or fire hazards. Some Russian Thistles can grow to be as large as a small car.

Where to look: Along roadsides and in open fields.

Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, 2007 Regents, University of California



Giant White Fly (*Aleurodicus dugesii*)

First found in San Diego County in 1992, these insects can damage plants by feeding with their needle-like mouthparts sucking fluids out of plants, through their production of white, waxy, hair like strands on the underside of leaves, and by producing honeydew (a sugary solution excreted by the insects) which can cause sooty mold to grow.

Where to look: Look for long white strands on the undersides of leaves on plants in your neighborhood. Some favorite host plants are mulberry, hibiscus, bird of paradise, and begonia.

Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, 2000 Regents, University of California



Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter (*Homalodisca vitripennis*)

First found in California in the late 1980's, Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter (GWSS) is an insect that obtains its food by sucking fluids out of plants with a long, needle-like mouthpart commonly called a “beak.” GWSS is widespread in our area and can be found on a large variety of garden plants. It is a significant pest due to its ability to spread a bacteria called Pierce's Disease, which is deadly to grapevines.

Where to look: On stems on plants in your yard. This insect likes to move out of view, so move slowly and look on all the sides of the stem.

Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, 2000 Regents, University of California



Bagrada Bug (*Bagrada hilaris*)

Arrived in San Diego County in 2011. These insects cause damage with their needle-like mouthparts and the digestive fluids they inject into the plant. They mainly feed on plants in the mustard family (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and kale) but large populations are known to spread out to a wide variety of other plants.

Where to look: In our area, these insects are most commonly found on wild mustard. Wild mustard can be found along roadsides and in open fields throughout the county.

Photo: Surendra K. Dara, 2013 Regents, University of California



African Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*)

Native to Africa, this grass is planted as an ornamental plant throughout southern California and is becoming a problematic weed. African Fountain Grass can grow quickly in freshly burned areas which can prevent other plants from establishing after fires. This post-fire ecosystem takeover makes African Fountain Grass a threat to fire-prone ecosystems such as San Diego County.

Where to look: Front yards in your neighborhood, roadsides, hillsides, fields.

Photo: University of California Riverside Center for Invasive Species Research



What pest did you find?

Directions: Let us know what pest you find by drawing it below, answering the questions and emailing to lueginbox@sdcounty.ca.gov

Common name of pest:

Draw a picture of the pest

What type of habitat did you find the pest?

Describe something interesting about the pest?

If you find an unfamiliar insect pest in your garden, feel free to contact the County of San Diego Entomology Lab at (800) 200-2337.

