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Pear slugs: characteristics and control

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Quick Facts

Pear slugs chew the leaves of many common trees and shrubs such as cotoneaster, cherry and related plants.

Pear slugs are not true slugs. Instead they are a type of insect known as sawflies.

Two generations of pear slug occur. Usually most damage occurs from the second (September) generation.

When severe defoliation is threatened, pear slug injury should be controlled.

Description

Pear slugs (often called "cherry slugs") feed on the leaves of certain commonly planted trees and shrubs during mid-late summer. Among the more heavily damaged plants in Colorado are cherry, cotoneaster, plum, apricot, pear, hawthorn and mountain-ash.

Pear slugs are dark green to orange in color, swollen at the head end, and slimy. When full-grown pear slug larvae may reach 1/2 inch and tend to lighten in color as they grow older. Pear slugs can be confused with the common garden slugs, but instead are insects. Pear slugs develop into small dark non-stinging wasps (sawflies) that are rarely noticed.

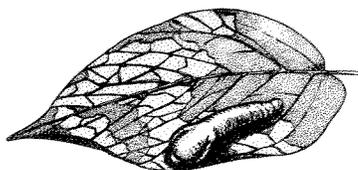


Figure 1: Pear slug larva on a leaf.

History and Damage

Pear slugs pass the winter underground in the pupal stage. During late spring the adult insects emerge to mate and lay eggs. Adult pear slugs are dark colored non-stinging wasps approximately 1/4 inch in length. The eggs are laid in slits made in the leaf.

Young pear slugs feed on leaves, becoming full-grown in approximately three weeks. Pear slug larvae feed on the upper leaf surface. The insect avoids feeding on the larger leaf veins and rarely penetrates the lower leaf surface. The resultant "skeletonized" leaves have a characteristic appearance. Chewed areas of the leaf turn brown, and when heavily damaged, the entire leaf falls prematurely.

Pear slug injury occurs in two peaks during the growing season. This injury coincides with the presence of full grown larvae, which do most of the feeding. In Colorado, damage by the first generation often peaks in late July. The second generation of pear slug larvae are usually most active in September. This later generation is often the most damaging, and can completely defoliate susceptible plants.

This information provided by:

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Control

Severe pear slug injury most often occurs late in the season and has little impact on plant health. However, the damage may be quite unattractive. Occasionally, heavy infestations result from damage to the first generation, which can reduce plant vigor. In these situations pear slugs may need control.

Most insecticides easily control pear slugs when used at labelled rates listed for control of caterpillars or leaf beetles on trees and shrubs. Among the effective insecticides are carbaryl (Sevin, Sevimol, Savit, Pine Tree and Ornamental Spray),

malathion and diazinon (Spectracide). Malathion and carbaryl can be used on fruit trees if waiting periods (1 to 14 days) are observed. Among edible fruit trees susceptible to pear slug, diazinon labeling is limited to plum.

Pear slugs can often be controlled using a forceful jet of water to dislodge the insects. Soaps have also been effective for controlling pear slugs (see Service in Action 5.547, *Use of soaps and detergents for insect control in Colorado*) but can injure plants such as cotoneaster, plum and cherry. Pear slugs are also readily killed by applications of wood ashes.

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