

Spotted Lantern Fly

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It's not often that scientists encourage you to kill on sight, but when it comes to the Spotted Lanternfly (SLF), that's exactly what they recommend. According to the USDA, if you ever see an SLF, you should squish it and dispose of any eggs found in your vicinity. These critters are a growing invasive threat in the Eastern US and scientists are concerned it could move to the West Coast over time.

These flies are originally from Asia and likely made it to the US by ship. The first U.S. SLF was spotted in Pennsylvania in 2014. One of the main reasons SLFs are so dangerous is because they are planthoppers. This means that they feed on a wide range of plants including grapes, hops, stone fruits, and hardwood trees. Their preferred plant is an invasive plant to the US, the tree-of-heaven. They primarily eat the sap from these plants and excrete a sugary, sticky fluid that can cause mold on the plant and weaken it. Plants are much more susceptible to diseases and death when they become weakened by SLFs.

Since these flies like grapes, many vineyard owners are concerned that this bug will expand its range west because of the many vineyards on the west coast. They are strong fliers that can travel for miles. Currently, 18 states have some amount of infestation, all in the Eastern and Northeastern part of the country. Other farmers are worried that they will wipe out their fruit populations as well, and could cause massive damage in our forests.

Early detection for invasive species is extremely important, so scientists are advising that we kill any spotted lanternflies that we see and if you're in a SLF quarantine zone, you should always check your belongings before travelling. States that are the most concerned with SLF populations include Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and West Virginia. If you plan on travelling to these states, make sure you know what SLFs look like so you can plan accordingly.

So... what should you look for? SLF nymphs are black with white spots and turn red as they get older. Adults are about 1-inch long and ½-inch wide with a yellow and black-barred abdomen. Their wings are very visually striking. They have brown forewings with bold black spots, and their hind wings are a very bright red. The hind wings also have black spots and black and white bars towards the rear.

SLF egg masses have about 30-50 eggs within them, and they can look wet and gray before they turn a dull brown that looks like cracked mud. Eggs are often found on trees, bricks, stones, fences, grills, equipment, and vehicles.

If you're on a mission and want to look for these bugs in your area, look for trees-of-heaven. As mentioned previously, tree-of-heaven is an invasive plant from China, and SLFs love to feed on them. They are often gathered in large numbers when they feed, so spotting them shouldn't be too difficult. They are generally easier to see at dusk. If you're in Texas and find a Spotted Lanternfly, please report it to Texas Invasives. They aren't currently a problem in Texas, but it doesn't hurt to stay vigilant!



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