

Leaf-footed Bugs



Western leaf-footed bug adult on lavender. Photo courtesy of Kathy Garvey.

The western leaf-footed bug, *Leptoglossus zonatus*, is the commonest of several species of *Leptoglossus* found in California. The name comes from the expanded plate on their hindlegs. Adults are about 1/2 in. (1 cm) long, with a pale zigzag across the top, middle of the body. Juveniles are differently colored than the adults, with bright red markings on a black background. Small juveniles can be confused with *Zelus* assassin bugs but can be distinguished by the black legs and expanded, leaf-like hindleg.

These insects overwinter as adults. The number of adults that survive the winter depends on how mild the winter is. There tend to be more survivors in warm, dry winters. Overwintering adults aggregate in protected sites, such as woodpiles, under bark, in barns and similar sites. As soon as the weather warms in the spring the adults disperse looking for food plants. Initially they will feed on the seeds of winter weeds later moving onto garden, farm and landscape plants.

These overwintering adults lay eggs to begin the summer generation. A single overwintering female can lay up to 200 eggs over two months in the spring once temperatures become warm enough; usually in March or April. The brown, cylindrical eggs are laid in a line of 10-15 on stems

or leaves. There are typically three or four generations a year including the overwintering generation.

These bugs can be found on a diversity of plants. In home gardens they can be found on pomegranates and tomatoes. Growers report them as pests of almonds, pistachios and pomegranates, although they will also feed on young citrus fruit, watermelons and developing cotton bolls. These insects use their tubular mouthparts to feed on plant juices and tissue, piercing the skin of these fruits to feed.

In most years leaf-footed bug populations are small enough that the damage they do to gardens and crops is minor. When large populations occur control methods may be needed. The bug can be controlled proactively by removing over-wintering sites—removing weed hosts, wood piles etc. During outbreaks control involves physically collecting and removing individuals by hand picking and dropping them in soapy water or using a hand vacuum, as well as using natural enemies (egg parasites) and insecticides.



Western leaf-footed bug adults and juvenile on pomegranate. Photo courtesy of Kathy Garvey.