

Insects in Alfalfa

Fortunately, there are just a few insects that are major pests of alfalfa in Missouri. The first of these is the alfalfa weevil. Alfalfa weevil adults lay eggs in the late fall or early spring. The eggs hatch in early spring and the larva mainly damage alfalfa prior to the first cutting. University of Missouri Extension entomologist Wayne Bailey has indicated that, due to recent weather conditions, there is an epizootic outbreak that may limit the effects of the weevil on alfalfa this year. It is still necessary, however, to scout for this pest through the first cutting of alfalfa.

There are three aphid species that can be found in Missouri alfalfa fields. These include the pea aphid, the spotted aphid, and the blue alfalfa aphid. All of these aphids feed by removing fluid from plants with piercing-sucking mouthparts. If infestations are high, wilting of foliage and stunting of plant growth can occur. These aphids are typically found in alfalfa during late winter or early spring. Increased populations of the pea aphid are more likely when rainfall is high. Although these aphids rarely require control, it is still a good idea to keep an eye out for them when scouting for other pests.

Potato leafhoppers begin migrating northward from gulf states in the spring, usually reaching Missouri by late May or early June. Like aphids, they feed on alfalfa by sucking plant juices and damage is caused due to the toxic effect of the insect's saliva. Unlike alfalfa weevil and aphids, potato leafhoppers are seldom a problem on the first cutting alfalfa. Scouting for these pests should begin after the first harvest.

For more information on these pests, including economic thresholds and control options, contact your county extension center or Travis Harper by phone (660)885-5556 or e-mail harpertw@missouri.edu.