

New Bug in Town

By **Margot Moser**

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Which insect comes to mind when you read the words **SERIOUS RHODO PEST**? Chances are it is the infamous Vine Weevil. In recent years however, certain Lacebug species are emerging as far more threatening and difficult-to-control pests of both rhodos and pieris species.

The two lacebugs of particular threat to rhodos are **Andromeda Lacebug** (*Stephanitis takeyai*) and **Azalea Lacebug** (*S. pyriodes*) which both originated in Japan. Andromeda Lacebug attacks rhododendrons as well as pieris (once called 'Andromeda' or sometimes 'Lily-of-the-Valley Shrub') while Azalea Lacebug seems to prefer evergreen azaleas.



It is easy to recognize the damage lacebugs inflict. First you will notice a yellowish-white, mottled appearance on the upper surfaces of leaves and, on the undersides, small black spots along with adult bugs and nymphs. Both adults and nymphs suck plant juices from the leaves, which causes stippling and leaves black fecal residue.

Lacebugs overwinter as eggs in plant foliage and produce several generations per year after hatching in May. *Pieris japonica* growing in sunny locations is much more vulnerable to attack than it is in shade while *Pieris floribunda* (Mountain Pieris) and *Pieris formosa* (Himalayan Pieris) are resistant, even in sun.

So, what can we do to prevent or deal with this pest? In my experience on the Lower Mainland, lacebugs showed up first on pieris and then moved to rhododendrons. With this in mind, I would not plant *Pieris japonica* in particular anywhere near rhodos.

If this pest does show up on your plants, you have think whether it might be best to dig them out and replace them with something else. There are no effective non-chemical control measures. It would be nice to think that the freezing temperatures we've experienced this winter might have killed at least some of the overwintering eggs, but chances are enough have survived to carry on. Trying to eradicate lacebugs non-chemically is sure to be an ongoing frustration and risks them spreading to other plants.

If you do opt for chemical control, treatment is best carried out in early summer when newly hatched nymphs are present but further treatment later in the summer may also be required. Non-toxic sprays such as horticultural oil, insecticidal soap and neem-based products may be effective. Coat the leaves well, including on the undersides and repeat regularly. Of course, plants in flower should not be sprayed due to the danger to bees and other pollinating insects.