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Boxwood Leafminers

Description: The boxwood leafminer is the most commonly reported pest of boxwoods in North Carolina. Accidentally introduced from Europe, this small fly seems to prefer American boxwood, although English and Japanese boxwoods are also susceptible. Boxwoods infested with this leafminer develop blisters on the lower leaf surface. Infested leaves are usually smaller, off-color and drop sooner than healthy leaves. Heavily infested boxwoods usually have sparse foliage and poor color. Shrubs are generally not killed by leafminers.



Adult leafminer flies emerge over a two-week period in early spring just after the boxwoods have put out their new growth. These flies are like tiny, orange mosquito-like (about 1/8 inch long) insects which swarm around or cling to boxwoods. After laying eggs in the leaf tissue, the flies die. There is one generation per year. Tiny, whitish maggots hatch and feed inside the leaf. As they grow (up to 1/8 inch long), the maggots become bright yellow. Several maggots may develop in a single leaf.

Symptoms: Symptoms consist of weak and spindly plants. Dead or dying branches occur randomly in the bush. The older leaves drop prematurely and the remaining foliage develops a yellow color. Leaves often have pink eruptions of spores on black fruiting bodies. Dead areas or cankers develop along branches or near the crown.

Control: A pesticide can be applied just as the boxwood leafminer flies appear in the spring. The flies emerge just after the new growth appears on boxwoods in April. At other times of the year, use a systemic such as Merit, Marathon, Tristar or Acelepryn as soil drench or soil injection.

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