

Control Lubber Grasshoppers When Young
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Small lubber grasshoppers are creating attention among gardeners who want to be proactive at control. When the grasshoppers are young, they are together in large numbers which is the ideal time to target control measures.

Most grasshoppers do not reach populations that cause serious damage to agricultural crops and landscape plants, but the eastern lubber grasshopper (*Romalea microptera*) is one of the exceptions. Extensive damage has been recorded on citrus, vegetable crops, and landscape plants. Amaryllis-type plants are some of their favorites. The eastern lubbers are found throughout Florida and extend north into central North Carolina and west into eastern Texas.

Description: This is one of the most intimidating insects due to its large size and distinct colors. At maturity, males and females reach 2.5 to 3 inches long, respectively. Color varies throughout the state but they are typically dull yellow with black spots and markings. Although not capable of flying, they have 2 pair of wings. The front pair of wings is yellow with numerous black spots and the hind wings, usually hidden, are bright red/rose with a black border. There is a darker form of the adult lubber that is mostly black with a few marks of dull yellow.



The immature stage is referred to as a nymph and looks very different from the adult grasshopper. Nymphs are usually black with one or more yellow, orange, or red stripes and the front legs and sides of the head are red. Some are brownish red but still has the characteristic stripes.

Life Cycle: The good news is that there is only one generation per year. In north Florida, eggs hatch in mid to late March. Young nymphs crawl up out of the soil and begin feeding on suitable plant material. They resemble miniature grasshoppers and molt 5 times before becoming an adult. July and August are the months that we see the highest numbers of adults. Females seek higher ground and begin laying eggs in mid summer. She



deposits eggs two inches into the soil in a frothy mass. Each female deposits 2 to 3 egg masses and there are about 50 eggs per mass.

Control: Do the math! Based on the numbers above, one adult female can potentially lead to 150 little guys next March. Obviously not all of these would survive, but it's important to control them now while before adults deposit eggs for next year. Once they reach adult size, chemical control is difficult. Although they are intimidating, they are not harmful. They are sluggish because of their size; they cannot fly, and can only jump short distances. Use a butterfly net to capture or a broom and place them inside of a trash bag for stomping and disposal. Some gardeners simply clip them in half with hand pruners or scissors. Chemical control can be successful on nymphs by using carbaryl, bifenthrin, or permethrin. To be effective, these insecticides should come into direct contact with the insects. Make sure the insecticide used is safe on the plant before spraying and look at label directions if spraying close to a water body.

Reduce populations by keeping weed populations in check. They prefer open pine fields and weedy areas. If you live next to a weedy piece of property or a ditch that is overgrown, you may have more problems with lubber grasshoppers.

There are few natural predators that will help control these pests. Insects sporting black, red, and yellow colors often mean caution for predators. If ingested, lubbers are very poisonous to birds and small mammals, like possums. A caller recently commented that she has large quantities of small lubbers and her chickens wouldn't touch them. In addition to being poisonous, the lubber may secrete a foamy spray that is an irritant to predators. They can also regurgitate recently ingested plant material mixed with semi-toxic compounds, referred to as "tobacco spit", which can stain clothes. When controlling these, wear gloves and old clothes just in case you are the recipient of these scare tactics.

For more information, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN132>. Photos were taken from this publication.