

Tortoise Beetle

Plagiometriona clavata

Cause: *Plagiometriona clavata*

Symptoms: Dark brown with translucent margins. Somewhat similar in appearance to the mottled tortoise beetle, but slightly larger and more broadly oval. Prominent hump or bump at the juncture behind the thorax. Leaves of low-growing plants cut full of holes usually are an indication of tortoise beetle feeding. The tortoise beetles are leaf feeders in both the adult and larval stages.

Demographics: Several species are occasional pests of soybeans and other Solanacea in other parts of the U.S. Importance: The adults chew a series of oval holes in the leaves. The holes are about the same size as the beetles. The larvae either chew holes like the adults or skeletonize the upper leaf surface, leaving a series of brown patches on the leaves. Some species devour the entire leaf, especially on young plants.

Worldwide Tortoise beetles overwinter in the adult stage, hiding themselves in dry sheltered places under bark or trash. The adults emerge somewhat later in the spring, usually in the last half of May or early June. Eggs are laid either singly or in clusters of 20 to 30, either glued on the underside of the leaves or each attached by a slender pedicel. Upon hatching, the larvae begin to feed. At first glance, they appear to be a speck of moving dirt or excrement. They have developed the colloquial name "peddlers" because of this habit. Upon completion of larval development, the larva attaches itself to a leaf, in a manner similar to lady beetle, or the Mexican bean beetle, and pupates. Adults emerge in a week or so and feed before finding shelter for the winter. Tortoise beetles can be readily controlled by use of an insecticide registered for the particular crop against chewing insects, such as Colorado potato beetle, flea beetles, etc.

Control: To eliminate the tortoise beetles, eliminate their weed hosts (bindweed, Canada and bull thistles, burdocks, nettles, etc.).

