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## Spotted lanternfly sighting in Fitchburg alerts public to be on the lookout

BY AMANDA LARIVIERE · THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2021

Approximately 15 miles northwest of Harvard's apple orchards and farms, a small population of the invasive spotted lanternfly was discovered a few weeks ago in Fitchburg, prompting the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, MDAR, to alert the public to be on the lookout.

"We are very concerned about the potential impact to pick-your-own orchards and to our agritourism industry here in Massachusetts," said Jennifer Forman-Orth, an environmental biologist for MDAR. "If we ever get to the point where we have a widespread infestation, people aren't going to want to go to a pick-your-own orchard if it's full of thousands of large, inch-long insects that are feeding on tree sap."

Although the sap-feeding insect has been in the United States since 2014, this is the first evidence of a breeding population in Massachusetts, according to a Sept. 28 press release from MDAR. The current infestation appears to be "limited to a single cluster of three trees" in Fitchburg.



A spotted lanternfly.  
(Photo courtesy of Rhododendrites, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

Native to Asia, spotted lanternflies threaten a multitude of plants, including trees, shrubs, and vines, as well as an array of agricultural products, such as grapes, maple syrup, peaches, and apples. This planthopper destructively consumes trees and crops and can hop short distances when disturbed.

The MDAR is encouraging the public to become familiar with what spotted lanternflies look like during all stages of their lives. One-inch-long rectangular egg masses may be found on any flat surfaces, and are yellowish-brown in color with a gray waxy coating. In its adult form, the spotted lanternfly is a 1-inch-long gray bug with black spots and red and white underwings.

At Old Frog Pond Farm on Eldridge Road, orchardist Linda Hoffman said all of the staff is aware of the spotted lanternfly. "We are familiar with it, but we have not seen anything," said Hoffman, adding that they would report any sightings to MDAR immediately. "We've had other invasive species that have come from other countries and often it takes a long time for agriculture to learn how to deal with them."

Since Old Frog Pond Farm is a certified organic orchard, chemicals are not used on the trees or fields. To prevent invasive species from attacking the orchards, Hoffman said their orchardists use healthier alternatives, such as insect traps and being vigilant about picking overripe fruit that could contain eggs.

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In heavily infested states like Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Forman-Orth said spotted lanternflies are a “rapidly evolving research topic.” Spotted lanternflies have been observed mating and laying eggs in apple orchards, so orchardists “could have to be dealing with avoiding the spread of these pests by accidentally moving around the egg masses on crates of apples.” In many instances, the spotted lanternfly has been known to “hitchhike” from heavily infested states during the shipment of produce and plants.

Jesse Panek, vice president of the Garden Club of Harvard, encountered a spotted lanternfly in August at the Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania. While sitting outside the conservatory, Panek and her husband noticed a “distinctive looking bug.” After a quick search on her phone, she had no doubt it was a spotted lanternfly.

“My husband tried three times, with quite a forceful swat, to get this thing,” said Panek, adding that it hopped out of the way each time. “There was no mistaking it. It was so obvious that it was a lanternfly even having never seen one.”

Although residents in other states are being advised to kill spotted lanternflies, Forman-Orth said Massachusetts is not at the stage of infestation yet. Instead, people are encouraged to take a photograph of what they see and report it.

“This is the time of year when adult spotted lanternflies are very active,” said Forman-Orth. “Early detection is the best chance we have at stopping the spread of this pest throughout our state.”

MDAR is advising the public to report any sightings of the spotted lanternfly with their online reporting form ([https://massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/spotted\\_lanternfly.html](https://massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/spotted_lanternfly.html)).

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