

Passionvine hoppers (*Scolypapa australis*) feed on many plants besides passionfruit vine. Several shrubs and my stinging nettle were covered last summer.

The pest comes from Australia and is extremely common in the northern, warmer parts of the North Island but has been known to affect South Island gardens as well.

Eggs are laid in late summer/autumn and hatch in spring as tiny little ‘fluffybums’: small, frog-like bug nymphs with a tuft of tail fibres on their behinds. They suck plant material through tubular mouth parts. They excrete sticky honeydew, an unmistakable trait of many sap-sucking insects.



If you touch the adult hoppers or nymphs, they disappear in front of you with a click – very entertaining for young children!

Organic controls work best in the early weeks of the nymphs’ development and before butterflies are breeding. At a later stage, they escape by jumping away.

From late January onwards nymphs go through their final moult and turn into adults, found well into May. They are often referred to as ‘lacy moths’ or ‘jet airplanes’, but they are true, sucking bugs.

After mating, females thrust their eggs into thin twigs and tendrils of the host plant. Every time the female withdraws the ovipositor from a twig, a tuft of wood fibres comes out. These rows of holes are easily spotted from March on, giving the twig a distinct ‘serrated’ look.

These eggs are the weak link in the hopper’s lifecycle.

They are around for at least seven months of the year (March to October). Removal in autumn will reduce this pest next spring.

Get rid of plants that the Passionvine hopper likes and

you don’t, such as privet. During autumn and winter take secateurs and cut off the series of tufted, egg-containing twigs and tendrils. These must be destroyed; put them in a bag and into the rubbish or your fireplace. They’re no good in the compost heap.

I needed something immediate as I was going to lose my favourite buddleia, the plant had the beginnings of honeydew and consequent sooty mould, and was looking as though it was on its way out. After speaking to various



people in the field, some research on the internet, and not wanting to the many other insects in the garden, I purchased a pyrethrum spray. One evening I removed any ladybirds or insects that I could see on the plants and sprayed.

The spray did its work all night, and then next day I got up bright and early – before insects were about – and hosed the plants down well; I was told that would wash off the spray and also dead hoppers. It seemed to work well – both nettle and buddleia made a quick recovery.

If you have any other ideas or strategies, please place them in the forum, under the heading “Passionvine Hoppers” so others can find them.

Thanks to Wally Richards, and Vin Hill for the wonderful photographs. The more I look at the insects up close, the more I respect Nature. This year, the hoppers are back and I am keeping them at bay by washing the affected plants’ stems with a high pressure jet of water in the evenings. And I will be more vigilant about destroying eggs.