



Topic: Spiraling Whiteflies on Coconut Palms

Question: This week I noticed whiteflies on the lower fronds of three coconut palms in our front yard. I also noticed black sooty mold on the cardboard plants and jatropha under the palms but no whiteflies on these plants. The coconut fronds are sticky with little white globs and are rapidly turning brown and crinkling. I don't know if these palms, about 20' tall, have ever been fertilized or treated for anything. Is it worth spraying hort. oil up onto the lower fronds? Fertilizing the palms? Other recommendations? Should I bring in a frond to show you?

Marsha, Pine Island

Answer: The new and nasty insect in town is the spiraling whitefly, *Aleurodicus rugioperculatus*. It was first collected in Miami-Dade County in 2009 and arrived on the west coast of Florida perhaps only months ago. So far, it is most noticeably on Pine Island. It is not the same whitefly that has become a pest to the ficus hedge. The spiraling whitefly commonly feeds on gumbo limbo and has been seen on black olive, wax myrtle, Brazilian pepper and areca palm. This is a big whitefly almost the size of a small fly. The female whitefly lays her eggs in a spiral pattern on the leaves and also deposits a white, waxy substance on the eggs. The feeding produces copious amount of black sooty mold which has apparently dripped onto your understory plants. Whitefly in general can cause plant decline, defoliation and branch dieback. Horticultural oil and insecticidal soap can help to control this insect. However, thorough coverage of the infested leaves is required and that might not be practical on palms 20 feet tall. Instead consider using a systemic insecticide to either the foliage, soil or on the trunk. Longer control is usually achieved when it is used on the latter two. Do not move infested material anywhere off your property. Such movement could start new colonies of this pest. We are conducting a study on Pine Island using infested gumbo limbo trees to determine which insecticides and application methods are most effective in controlling this pest.

Useful Links

[Spiraling whitefly fact sheet](#)
[Stephen's Webpage](#)



Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at (239) 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by brownsh@leegov.com 11/5/2011.