

# **Liriomyza Leafminer Management on Desert Melons**

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**Vegetable Leafminer, *Liriomyza sativae***  
**American Serpentine Leafminer, *Liriomyza trifolii***

## **Distribution and Host Plants**

These native *Liriomyza* leafminer species are closely related, have a similar biology and because they have a similar appearance, are often misidentified. *L. sativae* is the more commonly found on vegetables and melons during the summer and fall, whereas *L. trifolii* is more abundant during the spring and early summer. These two species attack a wide range of plants and have been reported on over 50 host crops including carrot, celery, cucumber, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, melon, onion, pepper, potato, squash, and tomatoes. They can also be found in varying intensity during the summer on cotton, alfalfa, and safflower. Ornamental flower crops such as chrysanthemum, gerbera, gypsophila, and marigold are readily attacked as well as a number of broad-leaved weed species such as nightshade, sunflowers and groundcherry.

## **Description and Seasonal Development**

Leafminers have a relatively short life cycle. The optimal temperature for development is about 85-90 °F and development ceases below 50 °F. The entire life cycle can be completed in less than 3 weeks under ideal conditions. Several generations may be produced during each growing season in Arizona. The eggs are very small and laid into the leaf just beneath the upper surface. After 2 to 4 days, larvae hatch and begin feeding on plant mesophyll tissue just below the upper surface of the leaf (Plate 1A). Black hook-like mouthparts are apparent in all instars, and can be used to differentiate the larvae. The winding tunnels (mines) that result from their feeding are initially small and narrow, but increase in size as the larvae grow (Plate 1B). Larvae emerge from the mines after completing three instars in as little as 7 days in fall growing conditions. The mature larva cuts a slit in the upper surface of the mined leaf, emerges from the mine and drops to the soil where it often burrows into the soil to form a puparium. The reddish brown puparium requires about a week to mature. Adults emerge as small, shiny black and yellow flies with a bright yellow triangular spot on the upper thorax between the wings. Subtle differences in color exist between the two species (Plate 1). *L. sativae* adults have a shiny black mesonotum whereas, *L. trifolii* has a grayish black mesonotum. Also, the black hind margin of the eyes of *L. sativae* distinguishes it from *L. trifolii*, which has eyes with yellow hind margins. Female flies' make numerous punctures (stipules) of the leaf surface with her ovipositor, and then uses these punctures for egg laying. Both female and adult flies feed on the plant secretions caused by the oviposition stipules. Female flies can produce as many as 600 eggs over their life span. Adults are weak fliers, and often are blown by the wind. Female flies can live for as long as 4 weeks.

## **Economic Damage**

The numerous oviposition sites by adult female flies can result in a stippled appearance on foliage. However, the primary damage caused by leafminers is the mining of leaves by larvae. Larvae mine between upper and lower leaf surfaces creating winding tunnels that are initially small and narrow, but increase in size as the larvae grow. This not only results in destruction of leaf tissue, but both leaf mining and stippling can greatly reduce the photosynthetic activity in leaves. Extensive mining may cause premature leaf drop, which can result in lack of shading and sun scalding of fruit. Wounding also allows entry of bacterial and fungal diseases. In melons, *Liriomyza* leafminers can cause significant economic damage to small and large plants alike, particularly in *L. sativae* on later-planted spring and fall plantings. Mining of leaves by the larvae can cause direct injury to seedling plants by removing chlorophyll and reducing the plants photosynthetic capacity (Plate 2C). Mines and feeding punctures also produce an entrance for pathogenic organisms. Excessive leaf mining in older plants can cause leaves to dry, resulting in sun burning of fruit and reduction in yield and quality. In severe infestations, leafmining may cause plant death, particularly to seedlings or transplant watermelons. Damage to mature plants can occur when attempting to hold the crop longer for a second or third harvest.

## **Management of Leafminers**

### **Monitoring/Sampling**

Yellow-sticky traps can be placed on the edges of fields to monitor adult activity and detect movement from surrounding areas. Traps can also assist in determining species composition. Young seedlings should be monitored regularly for the presence of adult oviposition stipules and newly developing mines. In melons, during the first 2 to 3 weeks after emergence, count leaf mines on the largest leaf on 5 plants in each of 5 areas of the field, especially in watermelons. After the first 3 to 4 weeks the fifth leaf below the growing point should be sampled for the presence of leafminers and their condition. Hold the leaf up to light and with a 10-14x hand lens look at mines for live leafminer larvae (they are clear yellow with movement in its mouthparts or gut), dead larvae (dark brown or black with no movement) or parasitized larvae (have dark cigar shaped bodies inside the immobile larvae) (Plate 1A).

### **Cultural Practices**

Cultural management can help reduce potential problems with leafminers. When possible, avoid planting adjacent to cotton and alfalfa, especially those near harvest. Crop residue of fields infested with leafminers should be destroyed as soon as possible after harvest. Shredding of crop residue before tillage is more effective in killing larvae in plant material than tillage alone. Leafminer larvae may be able to complete their development in leaf materials that have been removed from the plant for several days depending on weather conditions. Deep plowing is also useful as it is difficult for adult flies to emerge from anything but a shallow layer of soil. Destruction of weeds in and around fields is recommended as these can serve as sources of adult infestations. Row covers applied at planting and removed at first bloom have been shown to exclude leafminer adults. Melons plants that are not stressed for moisture or by other environmental factors can often better tolerate leafminer injury.

### **Natural / Biological Control**

Natural enemies, primarily parasitoid wasps can maintain leafminer population below damaging levels. Predators and diseases are not considered to be important, but both larvae and adults are susceptible to general predators, and ants. These natural enemies commonly keep leafminer populations low, unless killed by non-selective insecticides applied to control other pests such as beet armyworm, cabbage loopers and whiteflies. Choose selective pesticides for treating other pests when possible to avoid creating a secondary outbreak of leafminer.

### **Insecticidal Control**

Applications of insecticides should be considered during critical crop growth stages when mining is excessive or adult flies are abundant. Because leafminer damage cannot be reversed, harvestable

portions of the plant must be protected. In melons, insecticide treatments may be necessary to prevent economic damage if populations of adults and larvae build to high levels when seedlings have 2-4 leaves and parasitism is low. For older watermelon plants, chemical treatment is recommended if an average of 5 live larvae per leaf is found. For cantaloupes, insecticide treatment is recommended if an average of 3 larvae per leaf is found.

It is important to identify the predominant leafminer adult species present as *L. trifolii* can be much more difficult to control with insecticides than *L. sativae*. Many pyrethroid, organophosphate and carbamate insecticides are no longer effective against *L. trifolii*, whereas *L. sativae* adults are still relatively susceptible to many pyrethroids. However, most of these insecticides are highly disruptive to naturally occurring biological control agents, particularly parasitoids that affectively control leafminer larvae. Consequently, use of selective insecticides for control of worms and whiteflies will often preserve leafminer parasitoids so that treatment will not be necessary.

Several newer insecticides are available for controlling leafminer. These compounds have translaminar activity and can penetrate the leaf surface where they contact or are ingested by the developing larvae. This includes Radiant and the diamides (Coragen/Exirel/ Besiege), which also have good activity against lepidopterous larvae. This is often a good choice for early leafminer infestations when beet armyworm and cabbage looper are present. Higher rates may be required for control when *L. trifolii* is the predominant species. Radiant has activity against adults as well. Agri-Mek is another highly effective translaminar compound for leafminer larvae. Residual control will vary with rate, and it is not highly effective against the adult flies. Use of a penetrating adjuvant (i.e., MSO) with these products will likely improve control. Other insecticides such as TriGard and neem products (i.e., Azi-Direct) act as IGRs, so an application when larvae first appear is most effective.

### Leafminer – Melon Insecticides by IRAC group and mode of action

IRAC Group	Mode of Action	Chemical sub-group or active ingredient	Product Name
5	Nicotinic Acetylcholine receptor agonists (allosteric)	Spinosyns	Success, Entrust, Radiant
6	Chloride channel activators	Avermectins	Agri-Mek
17	IGR, Molting disruptor	<i>Cyromazine</i>	Trigard
18B	IGR, Ecdysone agonists / molting disruptors	Azadiractin	Aza-Direct, Ecozin, Neemix
28	Ryanodine receptor modulators	Diamides	Coragen, Besiege, Exirel
28+6	Ryanodine receptor modulators + Chloride channel activators	Diamides+Avermectins	Minecto Pro



Plate 1. A) larvae mining lettuce cotyledon , B) feeding damage to lettuce cotyledon, C) Leafminer adult; *Liriomyza sativae*, D) Leafminer adult; *Liriomyza trifolii*





Plate 2. A) damage to head lettuce leaf , B) damage to romaine leaf , C) damage to cantaloupe leaf , D) damage to alfalfa leaf.