



Early Scouting Reveals Some Natural and Harmless Visitors

Part of a successful pest control strategy includes early scouting, but before you decide to make a chemical application in the early Spring, make sure you do not have a harmless visitor like the blackberry psylla.

The blackberry psylla belongs to the family Psyllidae, commonly referred to as the jumping plant lice. Psyllids (pronounced sil-ids) are common economic and garden pests, often acting as vectors for plant diseases, but the blackberry psylla is harmless to Christmas tree species. The blackberry psylla feeds on the stems and leaves of brambles such as blackberry through the Spring and Summer, then commonly finds refuge from the Winter cold in nearby conifers. Both the male and female adults have wings and you may find them in the stems of your Christmas trees before the Spring warm-up and shortly after, usually until early to mid-May.



**Side view of an adult male
blackberry psylla**

Psyllids belong in the insect order Homoptera and



Top view of the right forewing and hindwing of the blackberry psylla

are closely related to aphids and adelgids, which are common conifer pests. Because of their small size (about the size of a grain of rice), they can be confused with common pest species so it is wise to be able to tell them apart. Psyllids look like tiny cicadas and, generally, have a harder exoskeleton than aphids and adelgids. The blackberry psylla is orange to orange-brown and has strikingly banded wings (see pictures at left). If you have any doubts as to their identity, send one to your local extension agent who should be able to quickly identify it for you.

There is currently no more effective control of Christmas tree pests than chemical application, however, the cost, in terms of product and time, dictate careful consideration prior to application. As a grower, you should limit exposure to pesticides as much as possible for the safety of your farm workers.

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