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Whitefly infestation spreading

The Miami-Dade County Extension Service is reporting a significant increase in resident calls about the spread of fig whitefly infestation. New signs of the infestation have been spotted in the Cutler Bay area and the pest appears to be moving farther south.

The adult whitefly, which resembles a white gnat, lays its eggs only on ficus plants. Its young feed on the leaves of ficus trees and hedges, resulting in leaf yellowing, defoliation and, in some cases, plant death.

Ficus, besides being a popular canopy tree, is also commonly used as a hedge in South Florida. Infestation has now affected most of Miami-Dade County, in addition to Broward, Palm Beach and the Lake Worth area.

There are remedies homeowners can take to protect their plants. The Miami-Dade Extension provides information on whitefly prevention and treatments to overcome the effects of defoliation. In addition to whitefly facts, its website (miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu) also provides a list of alternative plants to ficus.

If you don't have Internet access, call 311.

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