



National Agricultural Research Institute

Taro Pests



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MAJOR INSECT PESTS OF TARO

INTRODUCTION

Taro is an important staple food in many areas of Papua New Guinea. It grows well in fertile wet areas of PNG. The underground corm is harvested and eaten after cooking.

Several insect pests that are often necessary to control attack the taro plant. These insects attack various parts of the plant. There are seven insects, which we need to know that sometimes cause serious damage to taro.

the taro leaves. They are often kept under control by natural enemies but can cause serious damage after adverse weather conditions that affect their natural enemies.



Figure 1. Damaged taro leaves

TARO APHIDS

Aphids are small yellow insects with soft bodies that often stay together in a group. The young and adult aphids suck the sap of the plant. They are often found on the underside of the leaf and on the stems and between the leaf sheaths. High populations of aphid sucking the sap often cause the plants to be weak. There is also aphid wastes on the stems. The aphids also spread taro diseases like the 'Alomae' and 'Bobone' virus diseases.

There are two enemies of aphids that eat the aphids. The first is a ladybird beetle while the second is a caterpillar of lacewings. These two insects are useful as they eat aphids.

TARO ARMYWORM

This is a caterpillar of a moth that eats taro leaves. Eggs are laid in a cluster on the leaf. The larvae after hatching eat the leaf surface when small but as they grow bigger they eat by chewing the edges of the leaf. The caterpillars are gray to brown with white stripes on the sides. These caterpillars have round spots that look like eyes on their head and tail end. When in large numbers they can completely destroy

TARO BEETLES

Taro beetles are shiny black beetles eat the underground corms of taro. There are seven species of taro beetles that eat taro. In most areas they are two types (species) present. Damage can be very small to very serious. The beetles always live in the soil and are very hard to control. The beetles only fly around at night. No suitable chemical control measure is available but the beetles do not eat taro grown in water. Avoid growing taro continuously on the same piece of land. The beetles also feed on chinese taro, sugarcane, yams, banana, sweet potato, potato and some wild taros.



Figure 2. Taro beetle larva

TARO HAWK MOTH

The caterpillar of this moth eats the leaves of taro. The caterpillar is green with white stripes on the side and has two white spots on each side on its tail end that look like eyes. This tail end also has a thin tail that points upward.

This caterpillar, when in high numbers can cause heavy damage to leaves often leaving only the main veins. Young plants often die and reduces corm production in large plants. These caterpillars are seasonal and often are present in large numbers during and soon after dry weather.



Figure 3. Taro hawk moth feeding on taro leaf

They are two other caterpillars that cause similar damage. The first is a yellow and black stripe caterpillar and the second is pink caterpillar with thin white stripes on the sides. All these caterpillars are closely related and outbreak occurs during and soon after dry season. The other insects that eat these caterpillars are affected by the dry weather causing increase in these caterpillars.

TARO PLANT HOPPER

This is a small brown insect with black stripes in the back that sucks the sap of the taro plant. The insects usually live on the petioles or stems between the leaf sheaths and underside the leaves. When many of these insects are present, the growth of the taro is slowed down. The insect also spreads one virus disease of taro called Alomae and Bobone.



Figure 4. Taro plant hopper