

Exotic Pest Fact Sheet 6

Flea Beetles (*Epitrix* spp.)

What are they?

Epitrix spp. (including *cucumeris*, *similaris*, *subcrinita*, *tuberis*, *hirtipennis*, and others) is a biological grouping of flea beetles which are thought to feed on a number of host plants but prefer members of the Solanaceae family. *Epitrix* species are extremely difficult to distinguish – even by experts.

What do they look like?

All species of *Epitrix* are similar, being dark in colour, only 1.5–2 mm long, convex and covered with short soft hair (Fig 1 & 3). The common name of flea beetle is derived from the ability of the adults to jump when disturbed. Mature larvae range in size from 1-5 mm long and are dirty-white with a brown head.

What should I look for?

Adults feed on the leaves producing a characteristic 'shot-hole' pattern (Fig 2).

Why are they an issue?

The adults of the flea beetles feed on the leaves of the plants causing damage. This damage is not usually economically significant in older plants but damage to seedlings can result in death or stunted growth. The larvae of most flea beetle species feed on small roots or root hairs which may slightly reduce plant health and vigour, but typically does not result in substantial economic loss.

How do they spread?

The most likely method of spread of flea beetle is considered to be as pupae or dormant adults in soil associated with both host and non-host plants.

Where are they present?

Flea beetles are present in North, Central and South America, Europe, South Africa, Australia (restricted distribution), and parts of Oceania. The distribution of different species of flea beetles varies around the world.

How can I protect my industry?

Check your production site frequently for the presence of new pests and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common industry pests so you can recognise something different.



Fig 1: Potato flea beetle (*E. cucumeris*). Leaf injury to tomato seedling.



Fig 2: Typical shothole feeding wounds to a tomato leaf. Images 1 & 2 : Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)



Fig 3: *Epitrix cucumeris* – Potato flea beetle © Copyright Hadel Go 2014-2015 / www.discoverlife.org