

Get to Know the Good Guys

Be on the lookout for healthy populations of beneficial insects in your cotton fields.

BY DWAIN EDDIE MCGRUFF

Dem0029@auburn.edu

THERE IS no doubt the technology of controlling pests in cotton has come a long way in the past few decades. We are now several generations deep into the *Bt* technologies in cotton varieties that are capable of controlling a number of different pests with more to come.

But, Mother Nature has her way of helping keeping bad bugs in check. These are the many beneficial insects and parasites at work in your fields. This primer will provide information on key beneficial insects in an ongoing series. This is the first installment of five.

Photo by Eddie McGriff



Fire Ants

Target: Small and large worms, bollworm and budworm eggs, fleahoppers, and other insects.

Method of Attack: Search cotton plants at night for prey. Attack worms when they drop to the ground to pupate.

How to Identify: Reddish-brown to black ants with a painful sting.

Photo by Bradley Higbee



Minute Pirate Bugs

Target: Thrips, mites, aphids, whiteflies, small worms and their eggs.

Method of Attack: They use their beaks to pierce and suck fluids from insects.

How to Identify: Adults are long, flat and oval-shaped. They are mostly black with white markings on their wings.



Photo by Scott Stewart

Big-Eyed Bugs

Target: Small worms and eggs, whiteflies, plant bugs, aphids, and mites.

Method of Attack: Suck body juices from prey through beak.

How to Identify: Oval and somewhat flattened in shape, usually silvery-gray. Have wide head with prominent, bulging eyes.



Lady Beetles

Target: Primarily aphids but also mites, small worms and their eggs.

Method of Attack: Larvae and adults chew and consume their prey.

How to Identify: There are numerous species of lady beetles and their appearance will vary. Some adult species will be orange or red with black spots, but some are dark with no markings. Most larvae are alligator-shaped and colorfully marked. Some larvae, such as the *Scymnus* lady beetle, are waxy and white.

Spiders

(Numerous species including Green Lynx and Crab Spiders)



Photo by Scott Stewart

Target: Spiders are generalist predators. Prey includes whiteflies, plant bugs, fleahoppers, worms and their eggs.

Method of Attack: Some species are aggressive hunters and others ambush their prey. Some species use webs to trap their prey.

How to Identify: Eight legs but size and coloring will vary according to species. ■

Dwaine Eddie McGriff is an Alabama Regional Extension Agent for agronomic crops. He has provided consultation to cotton growers for more than 38 years.