

Pasture Pests:
Clover Flea (*Sminthurus viridis*)
Information Sheet

Identification.

The name clover flea is misleading as in actual fact they are a type of springtail and are known as clover flea, Lucerne flea and springtails. Females are normally larger than males but still very small (1 - 3 mm) both are yellow green in colour with brown mottling on their backs and jump when disturbed.

Place a piece of white card onto the soil surface and tap the ground around it to assess numbers. Adult females lay very small cream coloured eggs loose on the soil surface.



Damage and Distribution.

Clover Flea is found throughout New Zealand however severe damage is normally recorded in pastures of Northland, South Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. Clover flea will eat a wide range of plants but legumes, clovers, Lucerne and sub clovers, are their plants of choice. Damage is worse at late Spring when numbers of both adults and nymphs are high. Damage is less in the Summer but can be high again in the Autumn.

Nymphs attack the leaflets and this damage appears as leaf "flecking" during times of severe insect pressure the entire green tissue is removed from the leaf leaving a skeleton effect behind (see above photo). Losses of 20 – 50 % of the clover yield have been recorded and stock avoids eating pasture as the clover flea can foul it with its faeces. Plant breeders are selecting clover cultivars with improved tolerance to clover flea.

Lifecycle.

Adult clover flea live for around 15 days, the males and females mate and start laying eggs in batches of between 2-40. Depending on soil temperature the eggs take between 26 to 40 days to hatch into nymphs. The start eating straight away and pass through 7 moults until they are adults when the cycle starts again. Movements in soil temperature will determine how many generations are produced each year.

For more information or to discuss how to protect your pasture against Clover Flea please [contact Specialty Seeds](#)



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