

Common Grasshoppers in Florida ¹

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Grasshoppers (Orthoptera: Acrididae) are common insects in Florida's natural areas. They are among the most abundant herbivores in grassland ecosystems and are an important source of food for wildlife, especially birds. There are about 70 species of grasshoppers in Florida. Some species are quite rare and endangered, or unique to Florida.

Grasshopper species tend to have similar life histories. Eggs, clumped together in pods, are deposited in soil. Typically there are five or six nymphal stages between the egg and adult stages. Normally there is only one complete life cycle per year, but several species have more than one generation.

Feeding habits vary greatly. Some species feed only on grasses, some only on broadleaf plants, while others feed on a wide variety of plants. Many species will consume dried plant material as well as green, and even exhibit cannibalism. Often grasshoppers will disperse when favored food plants are depleted, moving into nearby crops.

Pictured are some of the more common species:

- **Green slantfaced grasshopper**, *Dichromorpha viridis* (Scudder) (Plate 1). This is generally the most abundant grasshopper in low grasses. Even lawns may support a significant population of this species. Color varies from entirely green to entirely brown.
- **Linearwinged grasshopper**, *Aptenopedes sphenariodes* (Scudder). Commonly found in lush weedy areas, the linearwinged grasshopper is representative of the few species which have markedly reduced wings as adults (Plate 3).
- **Southern greenstriped grasshopper**, *Chortophaga australior* (Rehn & Hebard). This species is found where soil is bare or disturbed. Male and female grasshoppers make a crackling or buzzing sound in flight. The hind wing is transparent basally but smoky distally. Brown and green forms of this species occur (Plate 5).
- **Southern redlegged grasshopper**, *Melanoplus propinquus* (Scudder). This is probably the most common grasshopper in disturbed and weedy areas. It sometimes damages crops and home gardens. At least two generations occur annually (Plate 7).

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- **Obscure grasshopper**, *Schistocerca obscura* (Fabricius). This species belongs to a group of especially strong fliers called "bird" grasshoppers. Its taste for certain valuable ornamental plants such as hibiscus often brings it into conflict with humans (Plate 9).
- **Wrinkled grasshopper**, *Hippiscus ocelele* (Scudder). A grass feeder, this species may occasionally be numerous enough to damage pastures in north Florida. The hind wings are yellow or rose-colored basally, with a broad dark band (Plate 2).
- **Southern lubber grasshopper**, *Romalea guttata* (Houttuyn) (Plate 4). This large, flightless grasshopper is perhaps the best-known grasshopper in Florida. Frequently observed crossing highways and invading yards, it sometimes damages certain plants, especially daylilies. It is an occasional pest of citrus. This colorful grasshopper may expel air, producing a hissing sound, when handled. As a nymph, it is black (Plate 6).
- **American bird grasshopper**, *Schistocerca americana* (Drury) (Plate 8). This strong flier is probably the most damaging species in Florida, feeding on a wide variety of herbaceous and woody plants. It damages field crops, vegetables, ornamentals and trees. Citrus has been severely damaged, although it is not highly preferred. This species normally has two generations per year and is unusual in that it overwinters as an adult. Nymphs are normally green, but at high densities their color shifts to orange (Plate 10).



Plate 1 .



Plate 3 .



Plate 5 .



Plate 7 .



Plate 9 .



Plate 2 .



Plate 4 .



Plate 6 .



Plate 8 .



Plate 10 .