Niagara College Canada

# Garden Clippings

Greenhouse Nursery

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 136

# Thrips

## Insect Description

Adults are slender, torpedo shaped and yellowish to brown or black with fringed wings. They are very fast moving and difficult to see without a magnifying glass. The nymphs are also fast moving but look like small, yellowish worms about 2-4 mm long.

Due to their fringed wings, flight is difficult for thrips. They often travel on wind currents and do not travel far. The wings can be helpful in identifying thrips as few other insects have fringed wings.

## Lifecycle

To survive winter temperatures, thrips hide in plant debris or cracks in trees, or burrow into sod as either adults or pupae. They mature from egg to adult in two to five weeks, depending on the temperature. They may have up to 15 generations per year outdoors and may breed continuously in greenhouses.

Eggs will be laid in plant tissue and hatch in three to five days. The nymphs feed for one to three weeks and then rest until they molt into adult form.

## Damage

Due to their size, thrips are usually not seen until the damage is done. Adults and nymphs suck juices from plants by rasping the flowers, fruits and leaves. The feeding usually leaves streaks on plant parts, often resulting in deformed growth. They may transmit tomato spotted wilt virus.

Leaves will often look bronzed, as if the leaf has been scratched. Leaves may be puckered or curl in more serious infestations. Thrips feces may be visible as small black specks. The physical damage of thrips may resemble that of other plant-feeding insects, making proper identification important.

They are known to be attracted to the colour blue. Flowers that are blue, violet or crimson will be more susceptible to thrips damage than yellows, oranges or whites. This can be a good indicator to determine whether you have thrips. They will feed on pollen as well as plant juices, reducing yields in vegetable gardens.

## Control

Dormant oil can be applied to fruit trees. Insecticidal soap, pyrethrin or neem may be applied to other plants, but the compatibility of the plant with the control should be checked by spraying a small portion of the plant first and observing the results 24 hours later.

If the plant is damaged, another type of control is necessary. Thrips can also be controlled with predatory insects, including pirate bugs, lacewings, lady beetles and *Amblyseius cucumeris* (predatory mites).

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