

Western Flower Thrip (WFT) control on strawberries

Dr.Eamonn Kehoe, Teagasc Soft Fruit Specialist.

The pest which caused considerable damage to protected strawberry crops this season was the Western Flower Thrip (*Frankliniella occidentalis*). While there are numerous species of thrip, it is this one in particular which can be a serious pest of strawberry.

This pest causes serious damage to main crop and 60-day crops. This species feeds on the flowers of hundreds of different weed and crop hosts. The pest can have many generations a year, but particularly in hot weather. Warm weather can lead to a huge explosion in the pest population particularly in the June-July period.

The main problem with this pest is that some growers do not identify the problem until visual crop damage appears. The pest itself is minute, usually brown or black in colour with a very slender body with two pairs of fringed wings. Close examination of the strawberry flower revealed in many cases a dozen or more of these insects deep down in the flower amongst the florets.

While there are both male and female thrips, it is the female which causes most damage. This occurs where she feeds on the plant cells by piercing into them with her mouth and sucking out the sap. She also lays eggs using her saw-like ovipositor into the plant tissue. Damage occurs where she oviposits into the young fruitlet. This leads to misshapen fruits with a discolouration, making the fruit unmarketable.

Control of this pest can be achieved by the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) with the use of the predatory mite (*Amblyseius cucumeris*) being quite effective. However, this predator must be applied at the very early stage of thrip attack, or else control will be difficult to achieve.

There are also a number of insecticide control options including the use of Spinosad ('Tracer') and or Abamectin ('Dynamec'). Please read the product labels carefully if using either of these products. The timing of application is crucial.



Figure 1. Adult thrips visible on strawberry flower. Figure 2. Thrip nymphs within the strawberry flower. Characteristic bronze damage resulting on the insects feeding on the flower parts.