

Controlling Queensland fruit fly in NSW- home and community gardens

Julie Dart

Senior Land Services Officer
North Coast Local Land Services, Coffs Harbour

Background

Queensland fruit fly is a native insect that is widespread through several states in Australia. It is a common pest that now occurs every year, in spring through to autumn, especially after a mild winter.

Residents and landholders who have fruit trees, grape vines, avocados, tomatoes and capsicums/ chillies are responsible for the control of Queensland fruit flies on their property.

What does it look like?

Queensland fruit fly is a small fly 5mm long, brown with bright yellow markings on its rear end. Although it is a fly, it has a more wasp like appearance. Maggots found inside fruit are slightly longer, creamy coloured with one pointy end. They often curl up and "spring off" when touched.



Adult flies on a match head for scale



Fruit fly maggots

Damage signs on fruit and vegetables

The first signs of a problem are sting marks on the skin of the fruit. These are tiny pin-pick sized holes that are darker than the skin and are often sunken. In tomatoes, a yellow or green ring forms around the sting. Eventually the fruit goes soft and rotten, as the maggots eat and grow inside the fruit. The rotten areas may be further infested by ferment flies, bacteria and fungi.

Control Program

1. Eliminate

Kill and remove any unwanted fruit trees- cut back to a stump and apply herbicide according to the directions on the label. You don't need council permission to remove fruiting trees in your own yard. Remove the stump after the tree has died.

2. Pruning

Keep trees to a height that allows you to spray from the ground, and pick all fruit using a small step ladder.

3. Regular sanitation

Check the fruit and vegetables **every day** for stings and destroy infested fruit immediately.

Pick up fallen fruit and vegetables regularly and strip trees of all fruit after harvest. Kill maggots by putting fruit and vegetables into a sealed plastic bag and leaving it in the sun for a few days to cook before disposal.



Fruit fly on an orange

4. Exclusion

Fruit fly exclusion netting is available from horticultural netting suppliers. Flyscreen or mosquito mesh can also be used. Mesh can be put over small trees and bushes after fruit has set to exclude insect pests. Whilst nets can be draped directly over plants, the use of hoops or frames to raise the mesh away from the plants is more effective.

For small amounts of fruit, exclusion bags can help keep out insect pests as the fruits develop. These can be white waxed paper or cloth.

5. Chemical control

Apply fruit fly sprays according to the label directions and ask for help at your local garden centre to choose a suitable chemical.

Due to increased safety requirements, many chemical insecticides are now no longer available for home garden use on food crops.

Always read the label

Bait sprays containing Spinosad and a protein attractant are available to home gardeners to control fruit flies and are also allowed in organic systems.

The products are designed to be applied to the base of the tree, or on lower hanging leaves to attract and kill flies.

They are not applied to the whole tree. Bait sprays must be applied according to the label directions to maximise success, as baits need to be applied regularly to be attractive to adult fruit flies.

Infested fruit will not be “cured” with a spray so remove all stung fruit before spraying.

Insecticides are poisonous, so make sure that you wear a mask (respirator) designed for chemicals and all other safety gear listed on the label. If the

label says “avoid contact with skin and eyes, avoid breathing in spray mist” this means that you should be wearing gloves, boots, long sleeves and pants, a hat, goggles and a spray mask. Read all of the label instructions carefully and follow them to the letter. Never use a stronger mix than what is stated on the label- this is both illegal and dangerous.

After the job clean the respirator and goggles. Wash spray clothes separately after use on a hot cycle with washing powder, and then run another hot rinse with wash powder to clean out your washing machine. Have a shower and wash your hair before you eat, drink or smoke.

6. Fruit fly traps

Traps are a monitoring tool, not a control method. It’s impossible to put enough out to catch all the fruit flies. Pheromone based traps like “dak-pots” only attract male flies. It’s the females that do the damage.

7. Work together

Talk about Queensland fruit fly with your neighbours and work together to control it.

If you have a commercial fruit or vegetable grower living next door, talk to them about working in with their program.

8. When travelling

Don’t take any fruit, veggies or grapes into the Tristate Fruit Fly Exclusion Zone (South West NSW, Victoria & SA). Inspectors on the borders can impose on the spot fines.



Fruit fly on leaf

© State of New South Wales through Local Land Services 2017. The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing March 2017. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of Local Land Services or the user’s independent adviser.

For updates go to www.lls.nsw.gov.au