

Thwart Thrips In Your Garden, Yard

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, June 28, 2019

Q: I have a white back door and thousands of these very tiny bugs keep landing on the door and then flying up in a cloud when I open it. I have also noticed what looks like the same insect flying out of my roses when I go to pick them. Can you identify these annoying insects and tell me how to control them?

A: The tiny insects you are describing are most likely thrips. These very tiny insects colonize a broad range of garden and landscape plants and are especially attracted to white, yellow and pale blue colors.

Thrips are very small and identification often requires a magnifying lens to see them. Their damage usually appears as scarred or distorted leaves and discolored or scarred flowers and fruit. The damage can vary widely depending on the host plant and its stage of development when the thrips sucked out the sap of the plant cell.

One interesting fact about thrips is that a single insect is called a thrips, and multiple insects would be called some thrips. There is no such thing as *a thrip*.

Thrips belong to the order Thysanoptera which means fringed wing. Adult are less than 1/20 of an inch long, are very slender with long fringes on the margins of their narrow wings. thrips vary in color from tan to black. Immature thrips, nymphs, lack fully developed wings and are more translucent white to yellowish in color.

The most common pest thrips are the western flower thrips which feeds on vegetables, grapes, deciduous fruit trees, strawberries, raspberries and herbaceous plants. These are most likely the ones you are seeing in your garden and on your door.

There are other types of pest thrips such as the citrus thrips that feed on citrus and pomegranates and there are even some beneficial types of thrips. Most all look similar to the untrained eye.

Thrips are a very common pest if you have any type of flowering plants in your garden or yard. The easiest way to check for their presence is to take a flower and tap it sharply against a clean, white sheet of paper. You do not need to remove it from the plant to do this test. After tapping, look closely at the paper. If thrips are present, you will see tiny linear bodies that are moving around. If you use a hand lens, you should see mostly wingless nymphs crawling around on the paper.

According to Jeff Schalau from the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, “By the time thrips damage is noticeable, natural enemies have probably already started controlling their populations. For this reason, pesticides should be applied only when serious damage is occurring. Heavy thrips infestations can harm fruit tree blossoms and potentially reduce the fruit crop. Most ornamental plants can tolerate thrips damage caused in spring and will develop normal leaves once temperatures rise into the 90s.”

The University of California Integrated Pest Management site states that no pesticide provides complete control of thrips. This is due to their tiny size, great mobility, hidden feeding behavior, and protected egg and pupal stages. Lace wings and other predatory insects have been shown to control populations and two newer biological controls appear to show some promise for thrips management: *Beauveria bassiana* (Naturalis O, Botanigard) and Spinosad — a bacterial derivative.

For more information on the control of thrips see the UCIPM website at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7429.html>

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.