

Spider mites

Commonly two spot spider mite, (*Tetranychus urticae*), but also *T. lambi* and *T. turkestani*

Damage:

Mites usually start as "hot spots" in the block, patches of yellowish/bronzed leaves, stippled upon closer examination. Heavily infested plants will be both discoloured and stunted. Spider mites are one of the most serious pests of strawberries if not adequately controlled.

Identification:

Examine the stippled leaf undersides with a hand lens to confirm the presence of mites, and note any predatory mites present – they are often reddish and faster than spider mites. At high densities, thin strands of webbing can be seen on the leaves. It is unimportant to distinguish between species of *Tetranychus* mite, as the control methods are the same.



Spread:

Spider mites are ubiquitous in the environment, but the battle against them will start earlier if they come with the nursery plants. Their population explodes in hot, dry weather, and they are favoured by dusty conditions. First signs of mite feeding are subtle stippling, and high populations cause leaf bronzing and create webbing.

Control:

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| Plant production | Start with high health strawberry transplants. Some propagators use predator mites for spider mite control; it is a benefit to fruit growers if transplants arrive with predators. |
| Pre-flower | If there is reason to suspect that mites are coming with nursery stock, apply predators (a generalist like <i>N. cucumeris</i> , or 'Mite A') in late winter. Growers may also opt for an early season miticide. Vigorously growing strawberry plants are the first line of defence – plants weakened for other reasons will have more damage. Scout more frequently as the weather warms to find hot spots early. |
| Flowering and fruiting | Reduce dust (cover or vegetate driveways, mulch between plastic beds). Increase humidity (mist in covered cropping situation). When hot spots are found, release specialist mite predators (<i>P. persimilis</i>). <i>Persimilis</i> is capable of eradicating a spider mite population, when releases are started on time and are unhindered by chemical applications. Miticides may also be used, but the ability of the mites to develop resistance to chemicals is a constant problem. |