

Strawberry Tarsonemid Mite

The Tarsonemid Mite (*Phytonemus pallidus fragariae*) is a fairly serious pest of strawberries. It is most prevalent in hot, dry summers.



DAMAGE:

This microscopic pest can just be seen with a 20 x lens. The mites are whitish brown and less than 1mm long. They live in the crown of the plant and feed on the developing leaves. Signs of an attack can be seen in the spring, but they are more severe in August after picking, particularly after a hot summer. The mites inject toxic saliva into the plant cells which causes the leaves to become wrinkled, puckered at the edges and turn brown. Severely infested plants become stunted, often in patches on a strawberry bed and may even die. Autumn fruits on heavily infested plants may turn brown and wither, without reaching maturity. Because of their late fruiting, perpetual strawberry varieties seem more susceptible to this pest.

If infestation is heavy, fruit bud formation in the autumn is often badly affected and the next years crop greatly reduced.

CONTROL:

Unfortunately there is not an insecticide available to the amateur gardener for controlling this pest.

The mite can be kept in check by burning the straw over the plants immediately after harvest. The straw should be picked up with a fork and spread over the plants and allowed to dry. On a day when there is a fair wind blowing down the rows, the straw should be set alight on the windward side, so that there is a quick fire that burns the leaves without damaging the crowns. After burning the rows it would help to promote new foliage by giving the plants a good soaking of water. If it is not possible to fire the bed, the only remedy would be to dig up the plants and destroy them. New 'Ministry certified stock' should be planted in a fresh bed as far away from the old crop as possible.