

Eelworms



Eelworms or nematodes are mostly microscopic worm like creatures. Not all are pests, many feed on dead plant tissue, fungi and bacteria and some are parasitic on garden pests. Slugs, vine weevil larvae, chafer beetle grubs and leatherjackets can be controlled in gardens by beneficial eelworms. There are however several different pest species of eelworms which affect soft fruits.

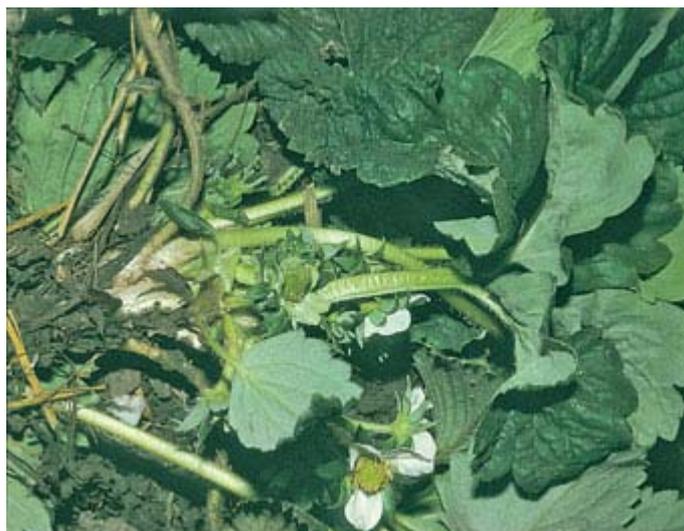
DAMAGE:

The leaf eelworm feeds in the buds and between the unfolded leaflets of strawberry plants. The fully expanded leaves are distorted and puckered, and rough grey or silver-coloured feeding areas

are present near the veins. Fruiting is affected because the main crown is killed and replaced by a number of weak secondary crowns. Leaf eelworm can also be found on blackcurrant, chrysanthemum and many other plants.

The stem eelworm infests parsnip, rhubarb, beans, onions and strawberries. It persists in the soil and will attack these crops if they follow each other on the same ground. Symptoms on strawberries are thickening and shortening of the leaf and flower stalks; the leaf blades have a typical crumpled and ridged appearance and the plants are severely dwarfed.

The dagger and needle eelworm are soil inhabiting and feed on the roots of strawberries, other bush fruits and weeds. More seriously they transmit certain virus diseases. Even when virus is not present the feeding of large numbers of eelworms on the roots will reduce the vigour of the branches.



CONTROL:

There is no effective chemical control available to gardeners against eelworms. The best safeguard is to plant Ministry certified stock to ensure that the strawberry plants are healthy in the first place. Parts of the garden from which virus-infected strawberry plants have been removed should not be replanted with strawberry plants, otherwise they may quickly become reinfected with eelworms.

Eelworms will only thrive and multiply if they have the roots of weeds to feed upon. Keeping fruit plots absolutely free from weeds reduces eelworm numbers and the risk of infection. Many of the eelworms, except stem eelworm, are unlikely to survive if the soil is kept absolutely free from weeds for four months between planting susceptible crops.

French marigolds are said to make a good companion plant in the strawberry bed as they give off a scent that is said to repel eelworms. If you straw your strawberry beds use barley or wheat straw rather than oat, as oat straw is thought to be a carrier of strawberry eelworm.