



The News Star – Monroe, Louisiana

MAY 5, 2006

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SECTION: ACCENT

*This article was published
by our local news paper,
The News Star
(www.thenewsstar.com)*

Troublemaking Thrips

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Some of Cristy and Waco Bankston's roses have lost their flair. And thrips are to blame.

Thrips, small insects that live on the leaves of plants, also hit the Bankston's daylilies, perennials and other flowering ornamentals. Thrips are similar to aphids. They have a head and thorax, and are usually dull gray, brown to light green and blend in with plants, said Jim Turner, nursery consultant at The Home Depot. Thrips can suck the juice out of a plant or infect it with a virus. Viruses are the major problem, said Ken Maki, horticulturist with the LSU AgCenter. There's one type of thrip that attacks flowers and another that goes for tomatoes, Maki said. "The roses and tomatoes look real good to them and they stop by and attack those plants," Maki said. In roses, thrips get inside the rosebuds and eat where the petals meet the stamen inside the flower.

In mid-April, Waco Bankston noticed the effect of thrips in his own yard. He physically inspected the blooms himself. "It attacked every ornamental, but the roses seemed to be a little more sensitive to damage," he said. "I'm still seeing effects of it now. To determine whether or not your blooms are being attacked by thrips, do this simple test: pull petals out of the flower and tap the rest of the flower over a piece of white paper, if you see moving dust specks, it's probably thrips, Maki said.

Thrips can turn flowers brown, cause them to never open and make them fall out of the bud, Maki said. Thrips have been a prevalent problem throughout the region. They begin to move and develop when weather conditions warrant. "We had a dry spell around Easter," Maki said. "At that time, they started moving out of the fields and into new territory."

Thrips attack roses and tomatoes differently. Tomatoes develop a spotted wilt virus, which causes the leaves to crinkle, the fruit to develop spots and impedes production. The best way to control viruses on tomatoes is to use a resistant variety, Maki said. He recommended: tomatoes 444 and Amelia.

For roses, an insecticide has to be used. It may be too late to save the flower, but thrips won't affect the rose bushes. "There are things that can be done to take care of the problem quite easily," Maki said. Rid your plants of thrips by making a spray or drench, Maki suggested. Be sure to include the active ingredient Imidacloprid or Orthene. Both are systemic and will control thrips quite well, Maki said. The soft-bodied insects can also be treated with

insecticidal soap or dust. Any of the insecticidal powders will do, Turner said.

Bankston found a product on www.rosemania.com that worked well in his yard called Conserve SC. "It's pretty expensive," Bankston said. "But I found when I spray that chemical, 90 to 95 percent of thrips are dead." Even with control, Bankston said, he'll continue to see damage throughout the year. But without control, it would be a lot worse.

Even if you haven't noticed a problem, it's still good to start a spray schedule before one begins to form. You'll want to spray once a week or every other week," Maki said. "Get a systemic insecticide that'll go into the plant and be waiting for the thrips when it gets there."

Thrips

Q: Where are they found?

A: Within the blossoms of flowers.

Q: What flowers are most at risk?

A: Light-colored or white roses are most often attacked.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: Brown or distorted blossoms.

Q: How do you prevent them?

A: Frequently clip and dispose of infected rose blooms. Control with insecticides can be effective during early development stages of the insect.

SOURCE: University of California Integrated Pest Management Program

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