

Mild winter means more early crop pests



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Question: I have heard that mild winters, like the one we are having, generally mean we will have greater survival of insect pests, including new and invasive insects that damage fruit and vegetables? Is that correct?

Answer: Yes, mild winters do not reduce the overwintering populations of any insects. When our winter includes a month or two with temperatures dropping into the mid to low 20's, that goes a long way in knocking back overwintering insect populations. So far the winter of 2017-2018 has only had 2-3 nights with temperatures below 32 degrees F. The current 90 day forecast for our area for the balance of winter is for above normal temperatures, so the outlook for cold weather suppressing invasive insect pests is not good.

It is helpful for gardeners to understand that cold winter weather does not eliminate insect pests. However, it does knock the population down enough to give most farmers and gardeners time in the spring to get crops growing well, and to get a pest monitoring plan in place before crop damage occurs. During the past 5-10 years, when winter included several weeks of freezing night time temperatures, early maturing crops like strawberries, have seen minimal pest pressure. When winter has been mild during the past 5-10 years, we have seen very significant pest damage to early and mid-season fruit crops.

The most troublesome insect pests that gardeners should prepare for following this mild winter are the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, and the Spotted Wing Drosophila vinegar fly. I have written about these two insect pests a number of times in previous articles, but we still get a large number of inquiries at the OSU Extension office about the damage that these two insects cause.

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (BMSB) has a piercing sucking mouth part that can penetrate into fruit like apples, pears, plums, peaches, nut crops like hazelnuts, and vegetables like tomato, pepper,



and sweet corn. The damage is done to all these crops when salivary juices are injected into the crop to dissolve the tissues for a liquid meal. Control of the BMSB is primarily achieved through timely sprays of insecticides like Sevin, Spinosad, or pyrethroids. There are

make timely pesticide sprays when you know they are in your fruit trees.

The Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) vinegar flies will be present early this year following the mild winter. Make sure to get your vinegar cup

commercially available pheromone traps that can attract BMSB to help you

traps out in late April or early May near your berry crops to monitor for this pest. The SWD lay eggs in berry crops when the fruit is just starting to color about 10 days before being ripe. That is the best time to apply an insecticide like Spinosad, or Pyrethrum. If you harvested blueberries or raspberries last year that were soft and mushy, it meant that the SWD eggs had hatched and the larvae were feeding in the inside of the fruit. Usually the

one early spray before picking will give you time to harvest your berry crops without damage. Don't let your berry crops hang on the vine when ripe. Pick them daily as they ripen to minimize the SWD damage.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOUGLAS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

Top: Spotted Wing Drosophila preparing to lay eggs in a berry.
Left: Vinegar trap for Spotted Wing Drosophila