

How to STOP the Spotted Wing Drosophila



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These tiny fruit flies, which have been a problem in Oregon since about 2009, are attracted to strawberries, red raspberries, blueberries, wild blackberries, cherries, plums, peaches, figs and grapes.

Question: I only have two cherry trees, and I was so disappointed to discover that my cherries are full of skinny, white worms. What happened? And what can I do in the future to prevent this problem?

Answer: Your cherries have been affected by the invasive and destructive Spotted Wing Drosophila, *Drosophila suzukii*, also known by the acronym SWD.

This insect has been a problem in Oregon since about 2009, and costs Oregon growers about a billion dollars a year. These tiny fruit flies are attracted to strawberries, red raspberries, blueberries, wild blackberries, cherries, plums, peaches, figs and grapes.

SWD is extremely difficult to control because of its very high reproduction rate.

However, there are several things you can do to either reduce or prevent this type of infestation in the future. All of these methods can be found online. Type in "OSU Extension Service Spotted Wing Drosophila" and you will discover detailed articles along with YouTube videos.

In order to control the flies before they lay eggs, you can keep their numbers down by making your own apple cider vinegar traps. An excellent



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step-by-step video can be found at the above mentioned website. These traps are inexpensive, easy to make and have proven to be effective.

For the backyard gardener with just a few trees, using a small-hole netting like tulle is effective. The netting must be very fine but breathable. Timing is critical. You must wait until after flowering so that pollination can occur. Then right as the fruit is starting to be apparent is when the tree needs to be covered with the netting.

The idea is to keep the SWD from laying eggs in the immature fruit. Keep the netting on the tree until you are ready to harvest. It is important to harvest regularly so your fruit doesn't get too ripe.

Ripe fruit is very attractive to SWD.

An easy but very effective way to minimize the infestation of Spotted Wing Drosophila is to practice good sanitation in the orchard or garden areas. The goal is to reduce or possibly eliminate breeding sites.



An apple cider vinegar trap is inexpensive, easy to make and have proven to be effective combatting Spotted Wing Drosophila.

PHOTO BY
STEVE RENQUIST

The simplest way is to immediately remove and dispose of all infested fruit and all fallen or leftover fruit. Also pick your fruit daily and quickly – don't leave any ripe fruit on the tree or bush.

If you want to add the infested fruit to your compost pile, that is fine as long as you know that the compost pile will have several days of very high temperatures of at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit. This high heat will be enough to kill any larvae. If you don't have a compost pile, simply bag up the fruit and throw it away.

Another method to minimize

an attractive breeding ground for the SWD is to learn how to correctly prune your trees. Pruning is considered to be preventive maintenance for insect and disease damage.

Also the use of drip irrigation lowers the longevity and reproductive ability of the SWD.

And the last recommendation is to lay down weed cloth (landscape fabric). This provides a barrier to keep the flies that drop from the fruit from burrowing into the ground and laying eggs.

You specifically asked about cherries, but these recommendations can be used for any of

the stone fruits or berry crops you may also have in your garden. Hopefully, the use of some or all of these recommendations will help you solve your problem in the future.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg, Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.