

Pests can attack melon patch

NEWARK, Del. — With the high seed and other production costs involved in producing commercial cantaloupes and watermelons, good disease and insect control are vital.

According to University of Delaware extension vegetable specialist Ed Kee, several insects could be a problem in these crops. The striped cucumber beetle causes feeding damage on young plants and also serves as a vector for bacterial wilt. This disease is more common on cantaloupes, though it occasionally occurs on watermelons, too.

"If you only see an occasional beetle, there's no need to push the panic button," Kee says. "But if they're easy to find, it may be time to spray." He recommends using either Pydrin, Sevin, Lannate or Thiodan to control this pest. Though the disease threat isn't as great on watermelons, feeding damage can be heavy enough on young seedlings to warrant control measures for this crop, too. If plants are blooming, take steps to safeguard bees when treating.

Aphids and mites can cause severe problems in melon crops. Aphids usually are active early in

the season. They stay on the underside of leaves and their feeding can severely stunt young plants. Check plants and spray with Cygon if needed.

Mites become active when the temperature reaches 75 degrees F or higher, the specialist says. Populations really explode during hot, dry weather. These insects also feed on leaves, sapping energy from plants. A hand lens is needed to see the mites themselves, but it's easy to spot signs of their presence — yellow or bronzed leaves.

While several chemicals are labeled for mite control, Kee says these materials have varying degrees of success. "Check with your county extension office, your neighbors, or chemical suppliers for information on what's working best in your area," he advises. In controlling mites, it helps to spray small hot spots before populations explode throughout a field.

Melon diseases present a different type of control challenge because their cause — fungi or bacteria — can't be seen or monitored like insects. Often, by the time damage is evident, it's too late for good control. Un-

derstanding what diseases affect which crops, and when, will help achieve cost-effective control.

Kee says it's a good idea to follow a preventive spray program to protect cantaloupes and watermelons from foliar diseases like anthracnose, alternaria leaf blight and scab. Start spraying cantaloupes when vines begin to run and maintain a 7- to 10-day schedule over the growing season. Bravo 500 does an excellent job. Difolitan and mancozeb are also effective.

When disease pressure is severe, as is often the case during hot and humid weather, the specialist advises growers to go to higher rates and shorten treatment schedules to every five days. "Don't stop spraying just because melons have begun to ripen," he warns. "Disease pressure then can be intense and can quickly defoliate plants, thus shortening your harvest."

Powdery mildew is a serious problem on cantaloupes, though it's rarely seen on watermelons. Bravo 500 will provide early suppression, but with hotter weather later in the season, Kee recommends adding Bayleton to the foliar fungicide spray mix at a rate of 1 to 2 ounces per acre. By itself, Bayleton won't control other foliar diseases, however. Also, while it has been very successful against powdery mildew, Kee doesn't advise delaying treatment once the disease appears.

The Bravo 500 program outlined above will also control downy mildew. This disease only reaches the problem stage every three or four years, but don't discount it, the specialist says. "If it does occur, you can expect to see it in late July, August or September. Ridomil MZ-58 will prevent establishment of downy mildew and eradicate any downy mildew

that's present. Since this fungicide won't give the broad spectrum control of the other fungicides mentioned, don't use it unless you have a confirmed case of downy mildew in a field."

Kee advises growers to check melons regularly for these pest problems and follow a sound preventive fungicide program. A little planning now could save some disappointment in August.



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