

EXOTIC PEST FACT SHEET 3

Chilli thrips (*Scirtothrips dorsalis*)



What are they?

Chilli thrips (*Scirtothrips dorsalis*) are extremely small insects (< 2 mm) that often go undetected. They can also vector diseases.

What are the main hosts?

Chilli thrips have a very wide host range. They feed on over 100 host plants from around 40 different families, including many economically important grains and vegetables. The main processed vegetable host crops are beetroot, beans and corn.

What do they look like?

Adults are around 2 mm, pale white to yellow in colour with dark, fringed wings (Fig 1). Immature stages (larvae and pupae) are also pale in colour and are without wings. Eyes are coloured red. The chilli thrips resembles many other thrips species.



Fig 1. Male chilli thrips. Image: Lance Osborne, University of Florida

What should I look for?

Chilli thrips feed on the lower surface of leaves, buds, flowers and fruits. Larvae and adults both feed by piercing the plant tissue and sucking up the released plant juices. A heavy infestation causes premature wilting, delay in leaf development and distortion of leaves and young shoots (Fig 2). Under heavy infestations, the buds and flowers usually die. Chilli thrips infestation may also result in premature fruit fall or can damage the fruit.

Why are they an issue?

Chilli thrips require access to soft green tissues so seedlings and young growing buds are most likely to carry the pest. Females lay their eggs into the plant tissue increasing the likelihood of dispersal by trade in plant material.

How do they spread?

Chilli thrips are dispersed via infested plant material in the movement of commodities – cut flowers, fruits and vegetables, and is frequently intercepted at the border. Wind currents may also contribute in the dispersal of adult thrips.

Where are they present?

Chilli thrips are widespread and are considered present in many Asian countries, parts of Africa, North, Central and South America, United Kingdom, Papua New Guinea (native), Solomon Islands (native), and Australia.

How can I protect my industry?

Check your production sites frequently for the presence of new diseases and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common pests and diseases of your industry so you can recognise something different.



Fig 2. Pepper plant showing feeding scars caused by chilli thrips infestation. Image: Vivek Kumar University of Florida.

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If you see any unusual pests or plant symptoms, call the MPI EXOTIC PEST AND DISEASE HOTLINE 0800 80 99 66