

# Emerging Pest Problems in Queensland

Wendy Morris (QLD) & Helen Newman (WA), Berry Industry Development Officers

2024 saw a resurgence of foliar nematodes, 2025 delivered an increase in fall armyworm, and 2026 is quickly proving itself to be the year of the thrips. Alongside these plant pests, local beekeepers are feeling the impacts of Varroa mite. So where to from here? What modern solutions do we have for these pests?

## Foliar Nematodes

Foliar nematodes are microscopic, worm-like animals that feed on the above-ground parts of plants—especially leaves, buds, growing points and flowers. Outbreaks are relatively localised, but they can cause serious losses when contaminated planting material and favourable wet conditions allow populations to build up.

Thankfully, there have been no incidences of foliar nematodes since the devastating 2024 winter strawberry season, where losses exceeded \$55 million. This reprieve is simply weather-related, and thank goodness for the lack of infestation, because quite simply, there are no chemical or biological control options available or waiting in the pipeline.

One thing that was clear from 2024 is that foliar nematodes are particularly damaging to 'Sundrench' runners. To help combat this, propagators now typically only offer 'Sundrench' in plug format. There have been good results with this to date, with the 'Sundrench' plugs producing earlier than other, later-producing varieties planted as plugs.

## Fall Armyworm

Fall armyworm, while still a burgeoning problem, is also a pest in other major crops, and this means money, time and energy have been dedicated to mitigating its effects. QDPI has an engagement hub ([bit.ly/QDPI-FAW](https://bit.ly/QDPI-FAW)) and Extension Officer Dr Ramesh Puri has assisted Berries Australia in developing a berry-specific fact sheet.

The fall armyworm can cause severe damage during a plant's vegetative stage by chewing foliage and burrowing into the plant. Growers are advised to conduct crop scouting regularly when pest migration is imminent – at least fortnightly at the vegetative stage – or weekly if larvae are detected.

If sprays are warranted, act fast, spray before dawn or after dusk when larvae are actively feeding, and always rotate chemical groups.

At the date of publication, Spinosad (Entrust® Organic – Group 5) remains on Permit PER89870v3 (Expiry 31/10/2030) for fall armyworm in berry crops. Chlorantraniliprole (Coragen® – Group 28) and Emamectin (Proclaim® – Group 6) can be used on strawberries and blueberries for other pests but are also effective against fall armyworm. Fall armyworm has high levels of resistance to alpha-cypermethrin (synthetic pyrethroids – Group 3A) and growers are advised to avoid these products as they are not effective and are harmful to beneficials.

**Visit the industry resource library at [bit.ly/BA-RL](https://bit.ly/BA-RL) and search 'fall armyworm' to find all related resources.**

## Varroa Mite

Prior to the existence of the Varroa mite in Australia, there were 10-150 feral beehives every square kilometre in bushland. That's a lot of bees, and these bees put themselves to good use pollinating farms. For many farmers, this free resource meant that managed hives weren't required.

Unfortunately, Varroa mite is now here and spreading rapidly across the country, with no possibility of eradication. When a hive collapses, it gets raided by other bees, who see it as an easy source of honey. Unfortunately, a collapsed hive is also a death trap; bees that come for the free honey take back Varroa mites to their own hives. With honeybees prepared to travel several kilometres a day, a single fallen hive can have devastating consequences on a large number of otherwise healthy hives in the surrounding area. And the problem becomes incrementally worse as more hives collapse.

The lack of 'free' pollinators means an increased need for managed hives. The problems with this are numerous:

- beekeepers are struggling to contain mite loads
- there aren't enough managed hives in Australia to fully pollinate all crops
- not all beekeepers and growers are following best practices

If you already use managed hives, talk to your beekeeper, and be prepared for increased costs as they grapple with the additional costs of monitoring, washing and treating hives. In the past, you may have only seen your beekeeper every six weeks. Now, six weeks is enough time for unchecked Varroa mite to destroy a hive. Visits have increased to fortnightly or even more frequently, leading to more labour and travel costs for beekeepers.

One of the biggest problems beekeepers are facing is that Varroa mites quickly become resistant to chemical treatments. In the USA, a product called Norroa has recently become available. Norroa is the first RNA-based biopesticide treatment developed to control Varroa mites, targeting a specific protein that ultimately stops their reproduction. Trials show that it has no negative impact on bees, lasts up to 18 weeks, and has a novel mode of action. Beekeepers are hopeful that it will prove efficacious in the field and will ultimately be available in Australia.

It's also extremely important that growers are respectful of the bees. It is now more important than ever to be mindful of spray programs that may affect bees. Make sure your workers understand what beekeepers need; simple things like changing a hive's position can have a big impact. A bee navigates back to a location, not to a hive, and a 'missing' entrance can leave them confused.

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## Thrips

Early 2026 saw a boom in thrips numbers, and not just the usual suspects. Joining the ranks have been *Franklinella intonsa* (Eurasian flower thrips) and *Scirtothrips dorsalis* (Chilli thrips).

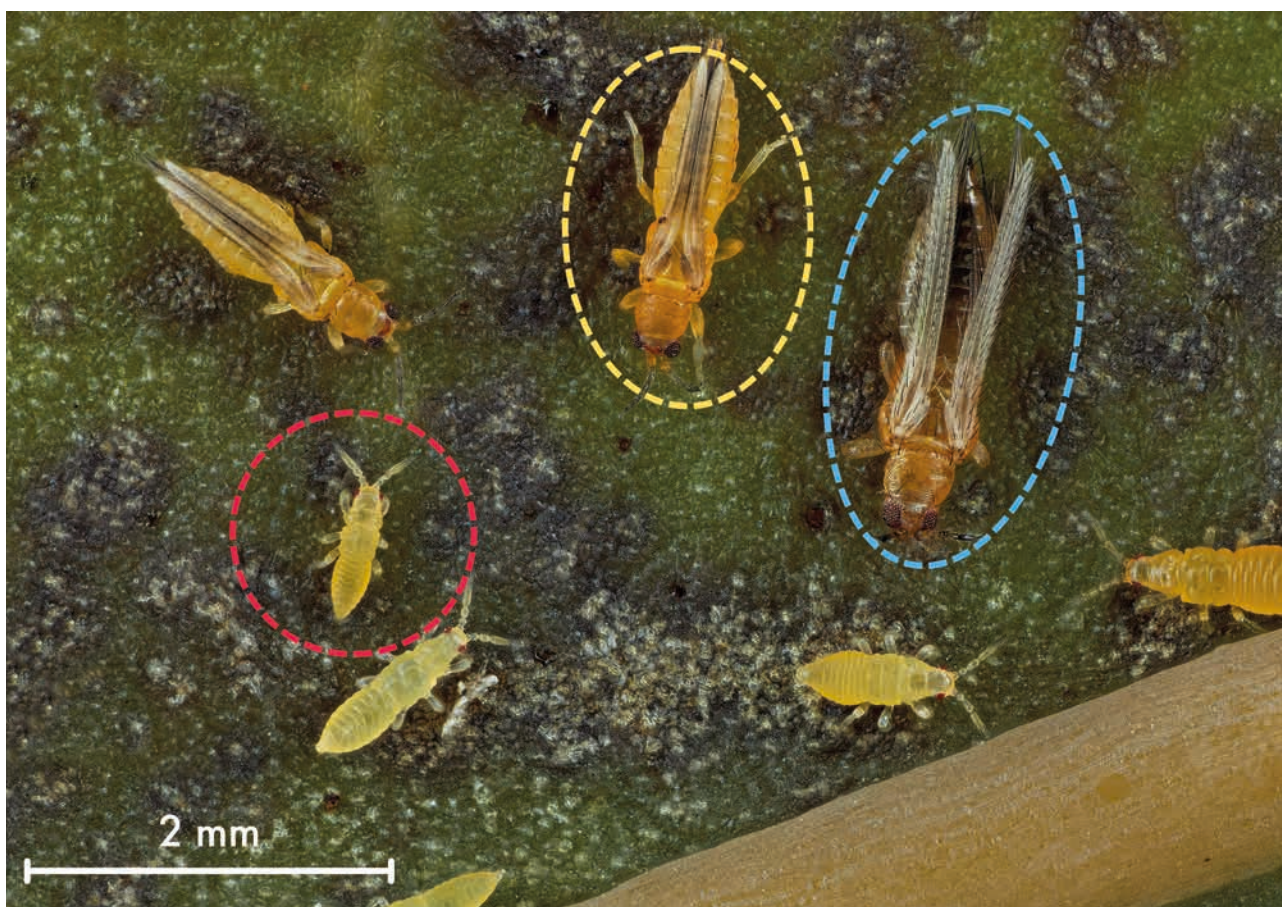
If you spot crop damage, the first challenge is to identify which type of thrips are present in your crop. Some of these thrips are very difficult to distinguish, so it is best to consult an agronomist or a testing body. See the 'Useful Resources' section at the end of this article.

The most commonly noted thrips in Queensland strawberry farms this year are:

**Western Flower Thrips** (*Frankliniella occidentalis*),  
**Eurasian Flower Thrips** (*Frankliniella intonsa*) and  
**Chilli Thrips** (*Scirtothrips dorsalis*).

Thrips are notorious for developing chemical resistance. According to many agronomists, one of the worst things you can do in a strawberry crop is to try to 'out spray thrips'. Thrips typically have a short life cycle and inhabit different parts of the plant during their life. A spray that reaches and kills adult thrips may not affect its offspring. Two weeks post-spray, you may well have a fresh thrips problem, and so the cycle repeats. Spraying for thrips also generally impacts your beneficial insect populations. So even if your thrips are taken care of - guess what - you now probably have a two-spotted mite problem.

**Biological control is the most appropriate approach to thrips control. Speak to your agronomist about what beneficial insect species will work best for your situation or consult one of the specialist IPM companies listed in Useful Resources at the end of this article.**



**Chilli Thrips *Scirtothrips dorsalis* Adult (yellow) and larva (red) and Western Flower Thrips *Franklinella occidentalis* (blue)**  
Photo credit: Pia Scanlon

## Eurasian Flower Thrips

Thrips species should not be identified on colour alone. Adults are generally only 1–2 millimetres long, and western flower, plague, onion and tomato thrips can look very similar without microscopic examination. This is where a service like Grow Help (Qld) is important to formally identify the species you are dealing with.

As of July, Queensland growers are in survival mode, holding off thrips but not making much headway. On-ground and New Zealand research suggests that, just as with Chilli thrips, releases of both *Orius* and *Cucumeris* seem to be the best-placed IPM measure to control thrips. *Cucumeris* targets small thrips larvae, while *Orius* attacks larvae and adult thrips.

## Chilli Thrips

Western Australian growers have been dealing with chilli thrips for a number of years. Good control has been achieved in **first-year strawberry crops** with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) using *Cucumeris* mites and *Orius* bugs after planting when first flowers appear. Where chilli thrips pressure is low, two releases of *Cucumeris* have been sufficient; in high-pressure situations, four releases in short windows are needed to gain quick control. Some growers also incorporate flowering banker plants, such as alyssum, into the planted area to provide additional nectar and pollen, helping beneficials establish faster. Strong strawberry plants with larger crowns and a good balance of leaves and flowers provide the best habitat for beneficials and appear to be less prone to chilli thrips damage than weaker, smaller plants.

**Second year strawberries** in the Perth region, which are kept over summer for early winter production, have been challenging, with very few growers successfully producing a crop in 2026. Chilli thrips populations that are left to multiply over summer have proven extremely difficult to control when plants are renovated in autumn; populations are too high to be managed with *Cucumberis* and *Orius*, and the thrips' short lifecycle means that they quickly outrun any chemical interventions. Parts of the thrips lifecycle are also difficult to target, with eggs laid into plant tissue and pupae and adults protected by dense foliage.

Strategies for managing chilli thrips in **blueberry** crops are still evolving. It has been more difficult to establish beneficial insect populations in blueberries. Frankie (*Franklinothrips vespiformis*) proved to be a voracious predator of chilli thrips and was able to establish in blueberries, but work is still needed to determine optimal release times and to see if economic control can be achieved in WA conditions. Other biological methods such as entomopathogenic fungi and soil-based predators are yet to be fully explored.

Current control methods in blueberries focus on early detection and targeted action, altered pruning strategies and variety selections, and creating unfavourable conditions for the thrips. The thrips lifecycle is very short, going from very low numbers to booming populations in just 2 to 3 days so early detection and action are crucial. Chilli thrips like warm dry conditions, so keeping plastic covers to a minimum or not having them at all has been an important strategy in WA.

Strategies for managing chilli thrips in **Rubus** crops are also still evolving. Frankie (*F. vespiformis*) has been tested in Raspberries at several locations across Australia and is so far working very well with little to no chilli thrips seen at release sites despite chilli thrips pressure in surrounding areas. Releasing Frankie early while the plants are in early vegetative growth and making sure pesticide residues on propagation materials are low and non-toxic are important for success.

**Visit the industry resource library at [bit.ly/BA-RL](https://bit.ly/BA-RL) and search 'thrips' to find all related resources.**



**Fruit damage shows as bronzing and crackling, ultimately reducing crop yields** Photo credit: Wendy Morris

## Useful Resources

| Specialist biological-control bug providers |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Company                                     | Main biological pest-management offering                                                                                               | Website                                                                  |
| <b>Biological Services</b>                  | Beneficial insects and mites, commercial crop monitoring, IPM programs and on-farm advice.                                             | <a href="http://biologicalservices.com.au">biologicalservices.com.au</a> |
| <b>Bugs for Bugs</b>                        | Beneficial insects and mites, fruit-fly management products, traps, lures and pheromones.                                              | <a href="http://bugsforbugs.com.au">bugsforbugs.com.au</a>               |
| <b>BioResources</b>                         | Australian production and supply of beneficial insects, including lacewings and parasitoids, for horticultural and agricultural crops. | <a href="http://bioresources.com.au">bioresources.com.au</a>             |
| <b>BioWorks</b>                             | Beneficial organisms and biological control programs for mites, thrips, fungus gnats and other pests in commercial crops and gardens.  | <a href="http://bioworksonline.com.au">bioworksonline.com.au</a>         |
| <b>PowerBugs</b>                            | Australian insectary producing predatory mites for thrips, spider mites and other crop pests.                                          | <a href="http://powerbugs.com.au">powerbugs.com.au</a>                   |
| <b>EcoGrow Environment</b>                  | Australian producer and supplier of beneficial entomopathogenic nematodes for insect-pest control.                                     | <a href="http://ecogrow.com.au">ecogrow.com.au</a>                       |
| <b>The Crop Capsules Company</b>            | Beneficial parasitoid wasps delivered in biodegradable capsules for broadacre and horticultural crops.                                 | <a href="http://cropcapsules.com.au">cropcapsules.com.au</a>             |
| <b>AgBiTech Australia</b>                   | Baculovirus-based biological insecticides and other selective pest-management technologies for caterpillar pests.                      | <a href="http://agbitech.com.au">agbitech.com.au</a>                     |

| Specialist IPM service providers |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Company                          | IPM offering                                                                                                                                                                                         | Website                                                            |
| <b>IPM Technologies</b>          | Independent IPM consulting, crop monitoring, pest and beneficial identification, grower training and development of biological and cultural control programs. It does not sell beneficial organisms. | <a href="http://ipmtechnologies.com.au">ipmtechnologies.com.au</a> |
| <b>Smartbug Horti</b>            | SmartBug Horti partners with Australia's leading growers to build robust, data-led crop protection programs - 40 years of field expertise, applied as practical Integrated Pest Management.          | <a href="http://smartbughorti.com.au">smartbughorti.com.au</a>     |

## Pest Identification Services

| State      | Department                                                                                         | Website                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>QLD</b> | Queensland Department of Primary Industries – Grow Help Australia                                  | <a href="http://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/agriculture/crops/test/grow-help-australia">www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/agriculture/crops/test/grow-help-australia</a> |
| <b>NSW</b> | NSW DPIRD Laboratory Services – Plant Health Diagnostic Service and Entomology Diagnostic Services | <a href="http://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/plant-health">www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/plant-health</a>                                                           |
| <b>VIC</b> | Agriculture Victoria – Crop Health Services, AgriBio                                               | <a href="http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/services/diagnostic-services">agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/services/diagnostic-services</a>                                                       |
| <b>SA</b>  | SARDI Crop Diagnostics – Horticulture Pathology and Insect Identification Service                  | <a href="http://pir.sa.gov.au/sardi/services/crop_diagnostics/horticulture_pathology">pir.sa.gov.au/sardi/services/crop_diagnostics/horticulture_pathology</a>                                                                 |
| <b>TAS</b> | Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania – Plant Diagnostic Services               | <a href="http://nre.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/plant-biosecurity/plant-diagnostic-services">nre.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/plant-biosecurity/plant-diagnostic-services</a>                                           |
| <b>WA</b>  | WA DPIRD – Diagnostics and Laboratory Services, Plant Pathology and Entomology                     | <a href="http://www.dpird.wa.gov.au/businesses/biosecurity/diagnostics-and-laboratory-services/plant-pathology/">www.dpird.wa.gov.au/businesses/biosecurity/diagnostics-and-laboratory-services/plant-pathology/</a>           |

Berries Australia strongly encourages all growers to investigate and adopt integrated pest management (IPM) strategies as the first step in managing crop pests and diseases. Effective IPM combines careful monitoring, cultural practices, biological controls and other non-chemical measures to support long-term crop health, protect beneficial organisms and reduce unnecessary reliance on crop-protection treatments. Where chemical intervention is required, it should form part of a considered and evidence-based IPM program.

Information in this publication about agricultural chemical products, registered label uses or minor-use permits is provided for general information only and was believed to be accurate at the time of publication. Product registrations, approved labels and permits may be varied, suspended, cancelled or expire.

It is the responsibility of each grower and chemical user to confirm, before every application, that the product is currently registered or covered by a valid APVMA permit for the intended crop, target pest or disease, use pattern and location. Users must obtain and follow the current approved product label and all applicable permit conditions, including directions relating to application rates, timing, withholding periods, worker safety, environmental protection, and recordkeeping.

Always check the current APVMA product registration and permit databases and comply with all relevant Commonwealth, state and territory requirements. Mention of a product, active constituent or permit by Berries Australia or the Australian Berry Journal does not constitute a recommendation, endorsement or guarantee that its use is suitable, effective or legally authorised in a particular situation. Seek professional advice where required.