Soap sprays against thrips in onion

Recognize the problem
Thrips are very small, only 1.5 mm long, elongate insect pests. They are light grey-greenish, but difficult to see. They suck on the leaf bases of onion. Infested onions develop silvery leaf spots or patches along the inner angles of onion leaves. Infestation causes premature wilting, delay in leaf development and distortion of leaves of young shoots. Under heavy infestations, buds and flowers are attacked and fall off the plant. Thrips infestation can be mistaken by spider mite infestation. But thrips produce green faeces while mites produce black faeces. You can find them in the angle of leaf sheaths. Thrips move fast, and are not aphids, which move very slowly.

Background
Thrips pierce onion leaves and suck liquid out of plants. Therefore plants lose more water than normal and cannot grow well. Bulb losses can reach 30 - 62%. Thrips’ skin surface is fatty and can be dissolved by soap. Thrips then die.

Management
Prepare a soap solution for spraying against thrips:
• Take soap powder or chop soap bars
• Dissolve 5 teaspoons or one matchbox size of soap in 10 litres cold water
• Mix and stir until dissolved
• Spray the solution on the infested plants twice per week whenever there are thrips
• Sprays should lead to coverage of the entire plant surface until it runs off towards the lower part of the onion where many thrips eat
• Do not spay during full sunshine or dry periods of the day, to avoid negative effects of soap on the plants
If you cannot obtain enough soap, you can add extracts from your nearby Neem-trees to the solution and reduce the soap concentration.
• Collect and grind the fresh lower neem tree leaves or ripened seeds
• Soak 1 kilogram overnight in water
• Remove leaves or seed rests from the solution by sieving
• Mix liquid with 1 teaspoon of soap in 10 litres water, stir, spray.

Scientific name(s) &gt; *Thrips tabaci*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania

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