

Tomato red spider mite

Recognize the problem

The tomato red spider mites are pale-orange to red and feed on the underside of leaves. They cannot be seen easily with the naked eye. Feeding damage caused by sucking sap appears as many shiny pale yellow marks on the top of the tomato leaf (see lower photo). Eventually the leaves turn brown and die or fall off. Severe attack leads to formation of webs on the plant (see photo). Red spider mites are difficult but not impossible to control.

Background

Red spider mites mainly feed on plants which are closely related and in the same family as tomato. For example: black nightshades (managu), potatoes, eggplants (biringanya) and weeds like sodom apple. Spider mites get everywhere. You cannot control them on tomato without considering other plants.

The mites increase rapidly in numbers during hot and dry conditions. Red spider mite causes more damage and losses in greenhouse tomatoes because of the higher temperatures and drier conditions.

Management

Cultural

- Avoid continuous cropping of tomato and related plants which makes it difficult to control red spider mites, since they always have a plant to feed on.
- Remove remains (residues) from a previous crop and destroy before planting new crop.
- Before transferring sticks (stakes) from an infested field to another, wash with soap and water and dry properly under direct sun for a week to avoid transfer of mites. Do the same for twines in the greenhouse.
- Inspect your crop borders for typical symptoms of red spider mite.
- Spray water regularly on plants to reduce dust, spider mites do well in dusty conditions.

Chemical

When spraying ensure underside of leaf is covered by the chemical.

- Use fungicides with sulphur, since they reduce populations of mites.
- You can also use miticides which are specific for mites e.g. Dynamec (active ingredient abamectin), Oberon (spiromesifen) or Omite (propargite).

When using a pesticide, always wear protective clothing and follow the instructions on the product label, such as dosage, timing of application, and pre-harvest interval.

Scientific name(s) > *Tetranychus spp.*

Extensive webbing on a tomato plant in a greenhouse. When the attack reaches this stage the spider mites are difficult to control. (Photo by RSM project, ICIPE)



Spider mite feeding under the leaf produces a typical loss of colour and gradual yellowing seen from above, particularly around the main veins. (Photo by Eric Boa, CABI)



The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Kenya



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