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Inviting Thrips Indoors

As winter approaches, we start to move our potted plants indoors. One insect that may go undetected as you move in those outdoor plants are thrips. These insects are very tiny, almost microscopic insects that can be a nuisance since their mouthparts are able to penetrate into human skin, causing a prickly sensation.

Female thrips lay eggs inside plant leaf tissue, using a serrated ovipositor to cut through the plant tissue. This allows the eggs and larvae to be well protected from insecticides as well as natural enemies. The immature thrips will feed on the plant tissue until it falls to the ground to pupate. Thrips undergo a prepupal and pupal stage before becoming an adult. The total length of the lifecycle from egg to adult can be completed in 7 ½ to 13 days.

Thrips use their rasping sucking mouthparts to cut open epidermal cells to release the contents that are then ingested. This causes the cells to collapse due to absence of its contents. This causes the discoloration and deformities of leaves and petals.

Some Control Options:

Cultural Control Tactics: Dispose of weeds, trash or debris to reduce the thrips population, since these areas may serve as overwintering sites for thrips. Avoid planting thrips susceptible plants in areas close to wheat or rye fields. Wheat and rye are both good overwintering sites for some thrips species that can attack landscape plants. Discard infested plant materials to avoid infesting other plants.

Biological Control Tactics: Some natural enemies can be purchased in order to help control thrips. One natural enemy of thrips is the adult minute pirate bug (*Orius* sp.), which attacks both immature and adult thrips. Another natural enemy is the *Neoseiulus* sp. predatory female adult mite, which attacks the first instar thrips. Another natural enemy is soil-dwelling predacious mites, *Hypoaspsis* sp, which attack the prepupal and pupal stages of thrips in the soil. Also *Beauveria bassiana,* a fungus sold in certain biopesticide products, is effective at controlling thrips. This fungus grows and reproduces on the host, eventually killing the thrips.

Chemical Control Tactics: Some chemical control options include products such as insecticidal soaps or products containing spinosad, permethrin or acephate applied as foliar sprays.

Western flower thrips, *Frankliniella occidentalis* (Pergande).

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