

Farmer Fact Sheet 24: Spider Mites



What are they?

Mites are not insects; they have eight legs and are related to spiders. They feed on many crop plants, such as beans, cassava, cucumber and related crops, eggplant, potato, *sliperi kabis*, squash, taro and tomato. Two-spotted mites are among the most common (photo, lower centre). The scientific name is *Tetranychus*.

What damage do they do?

Spider mites have needle-like mouthparts, and use them to suck the juice from leaves. This kills the cells, and white to pale yellow dots occur (photos, left & right), usually between the main veins. Two-spotted mites make webs (like spiders) on the under surface. Leaves die early and fall. Outbreaks are worse during dry weather.

How do I identify them?

It is difficult to see mites without a microscope. Look for the white spots on the top of the leaf and the webbing on the bottom, when populations are high. If you think there are mites, place a sheet of white paper beneath the leaves and hit them sharply.

How do I manage spider mites?

Predatory mites usually keep populations of spider mites in check, as do ladybird beetles, lacewings, thrips and other insects.

Cultural control:

- Make sure the plant have the water and nutrients they need for good growth;
- If leaves become dusty or dirty, this may kill predators, so choose a better site.

Chemical control:

- Use horticultural oil and soaps rather than insecticides or miticides, but test them on a few plants first to see if they cause damage;
- If you use insecticides or miticides, rotate between the different groups to prevent mites becoming resistant to any one of them. Note, eggs are difficult to kill, and so are young, so apply sprays 5-10-days' apart. See your MAL extension officer.