

Question: Could you remind us of what the program for control of redberry mite is in blackberries?

Redberry mite activity prevents berries from ripening uniformly, causing from several to many drupelets to remain bright red on the otherwise black and fully ripe fruit. The affected drupelets never ripen and subsequently that fruit is not suitable for consumption. The problem of redberry mite in the Pajaro Valley is not a small one. Commercial blackberry growers estimate that left unaddressed, redberry mite infestations can cause 10-50% loss in total yields and personally I have seen a few instances where redberry mite resulted in a near total loss of harvestable fruit.

Fortunately, there is a good method for managing redberry mite in blackberries due to the efforts several years ago of the University of California Cooperative Extension working together with a private industry entomologist. This method is usable in both conventional and organic situations and involves the use of Golden Pest Spray oil, which is a plant-derived horticultural oil and is applied at key physiological stages of the blackberry plant's development.

Redberry management needs to be proactive in that growers and gardeners are to be applying the oil before the symptoms start to show up on the fruit but not too early as to damage the tender developing plant parts. Thus, UC IPM guidelines instruct applicators to begin treatment with Golden Pest Spray Oil once the plant is at about at the stage of 50% flowering and some green fruit are beginning to emerge. The rate of the Golden Pest Spray oil recommended by the guidelines is 1.2 to 2% of the total mix volume, so for example 1.2 gallons of oil would be added to 100 gallons of water carrier. This initial application of oil having been made, two or three more applications of the oil are put on, spaced at intervals of 10 to 14 days apart. At this pace, by the time the time of the last oil application, one should be seeing the first harvestable blackberry fruit showing up.

The above has been a primer of using horticultural oil to manage redberry mite in blackberries. Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry cultivation.