



A Homeowner's Guide to the Olive Fruit Fly

The olive fruit fly is a serious pest that now threatens olive growers and olive oil producers throughout California. Olive fruit flies develop inside olive fruit, making the olives unsuitable for canning or olive oil production.

The olive fruit fly was first detected in California in 1998 and is currently found throughout most of the state. In Napa County, it was first found in 2001 and now exists throughout the county. Flies can travel several miles in search of olives in which to lay their eggs. There can be 3-5 generations of flies per year. The largest populations occur in the fall when there are olives on most trees.

Homeowners can help minimize the damage caused by olive fruit flies in the following ways:

- **Plant fruitless olive trees.** In many landscape settings, olive trees are desired for their beauty, but not for fruit production. Fruitless varieties are available from most retail nurseries upon request. Since olive fruit flies only reproduce in the fruit, fruitless varieties will not support their development.
- **Eliminate fruit from existing trees.** If you do not want olive fruit, spray your trees during bloom (May/June) to reduce fruit set. High-pressure water alone can be effective. Products containing ethephon, a plant growth regulator used to eliminate undesirable fruit, are available at most garden centers. They must be sprayed onto trees during bloom.
- **Harvest early.** By harvesting your olives early (November), you can reduce the number of fruit flies produced on your tree.
- **Remove all olives from trees and the ground.** Any olives left on trees can support olive fruit fly reproduction during the winter. Olives left on the ground may contain larvae that can still complete their development. Dispose of unwanted olives in sealed plastic bags.

Commercial growers have successfully controlled olive fly using spinosad - an organically approved insecticide derived from a soil dwelling bacterium. Homeowner formulations of this product are not yet available. An "attract and kill" insect trap that can be hung in olive trees looks promising, but is not yet available in the U.S.

More information about olive fruit fly is available from the following resources:

- UC Cooperative Extension Napa County - <http://cenapa.ucdavis.edu/>
- UC Master Gardeners of Napa County: (707) 253-4221
- Napa County Agricultural Commissioner: (707) 253-4357
- Napa County Farm Bureau (for commercial olive producers): (707) 224-5403
- California Olive Oil Council: www.cooc.com

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