

Confronting the russet mites in tomatoes

Russet mite (*Aculops lycopersici*) belongs to the family Eriophyidae and is cosmopolitan in distribution. Unlike other arachnids (spiders, mites and ticks) with four pairs of legs, russet mites only have two pairs of legs. It is an important pest of tomatoes, however other plants belonging to the family Solanaceae may also be affected. These mites could be easily confused with spider mites, which are larger and round and often produce webbing. Russet mites are extremely small and cannot be seen without a hand lens/ microscope. The mites are soft bodied, wedge shaped and are generally creamy yellow or tan colored. As the russet mites are hard to diagnose, the growers sometimes do not realize this problem until sustaining several weeks of increasing damage.



Pic credit: Koppert Biological Systems

Damage starts at the bottom of the plant and moves upward as the mites move up and may be confused with nutritional deficiency or plant disease. The mites feed on underside of the leaves causing bronzing and curling of leaves that later become dry and drop off.

Symptoms on fruit are very conspicuous and devastating. The fruit surface develops tiny cracks and the skin of the fruit becomes coarse and turns brown. This phenomenon is called as “russeting”.



Pic credit: Infonet Biovision



Pic credit: Agrobases Australia

These discolored and “russeted” tomatoes lose the aesthetic value and are not marketable. If not controlled, the russet mite can defoliate and kill the whole plant especially in hot weather. Observe and monitor for damage and once the mites are diagnosed accurately, treatment/control should be implemented. Sulfur dust, wettable sulfur or other recommended miticides are effective in managing russet mites.

Sources:

UCIPM Statewide Integrated Pest Management program
Rick Snyder, Mississippi State University
Koppert Biological Systems

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