Speaker 1:

Welcome to Urban Plant Health Networks Podcast Series: The Good, The Bad, and the Bug-ly.

Drew Radford:

Queensland Fruit Fly is a significant horticultural pest now found in Victoria. It creates problems for both home gardeners and fruit producers because it attacks and damages a wide range of fruit and vegetables. So, it’s really important for everyone to manage fruit fly in their own gardens to protect the state’s horticultural industries. Someone who's trying to build awareness of how to manage fruit fly is Bronwyn Koll, regional coordinator of the Yarra Valley Queensland Fruit Fly Group. Bronwyn, thanks for joining us for this Urban Plant Health Network podcast.

Bronwyn Koll:

Thank you for having me.

Drew Radford:

Bronwyn, firstly, what is it? And how's it a pest?

Bronwyn Koll:

It's a very small insect that can lay eggs into fruit and it can destroy the inside of that fruit. So, if you were planning on eating it or selling it, your plans certainly need to change.

Drew Radford:

So, Bronwyn, what's it look like and how do people identify it?

Bronwyn Koll:

When I speak with people, the first thing they ask me is what to look for. And it's very hard to look for a Queensland Fruit Fly in its natural habitat floating around the treetops because it's very small and it's brown-y red in colour. Most people actually know that they've got fruit fly when there's rot and maggots in their fruit. For those people who are looking for Queensland Fruit Fly and know that they have to look for it or find it, you put a trap out and that's when they can actually catch the adult. And that adult is distinguished by some yellow shoulder pads, two yellow stripes on its back, it almost looks like GT stripes on a car, and a small yellow triangle at the back of its thorax. It's bigger than a compost fly and smaller than a bee. So that's the best way to describe it without actually showing you a picture.

Drew Radford:

That's a fantastic description and I've got it very clearly in my head now. So, what crops does it affect, Bronwyn?

Bronwyn Koll:

So, that's fruit and even some what we call fruiting vegetables.Some people call chilis capsicums and tomatoes and eggplant vegetables, technically they're fruit. Typical fruits that you and I would like to eat that Queensland Fruit Fly can get into include all of your apricots, peaches, nectarines, and plums so they're stone fruit. The other one that it can get into is apples, pears, and quinces. And then, you've got all of the ones that can't be grouped. So we have loquats at the start of the season, Queensland Fruit Fly love to get into those. And it can even get into ripe avocados and even kiwi fruit, even berries, raspberries and blackberries. Citrus is another one. It likes the sweeter lemons, loves oranges, early grapefruit. There's a whole range of over a hundred fruits that Queensland Fruit Fly will use to lay its eggs in as a breeding ground.

Drew Radford:

That sounds highly problematic to say the least. What then can people do in the home gardens to prevent or manage it?

Bronwyn Koll:

A really easy thing to remember is pick, prune, and protect. The way the life cycle of the fruit fly works is their eggs are laid into the fruit and over a period of time, those eggs develop into larvae or maggots, depending on what term you want to use. And once that larvae has reached maturity, it pops out of the fruit and it goes to the ground and in that ground environment, so mulch and compost and soil, it develops a pupa case. And that's where it changes from a larvae into a Queensland Fruit Fly, the adult version with legs and wings. So, by picking the fruit, you never actually let the fruit fall to the ground. So, you are actually physically stopping the insect breeding and creating a population in your backyard. So, that's the important part of picking fruit.

Pruning is where we bring the fruit tree back down to a manageable size. We can't control what grows 30, 40 feet up in the air. And so, if you prune during the winter and do some summer pruning, it makes the whole harvest and protection of that tree or that crop a lot easier. And then the protect component, we often advise people to use an insect mesh or a netting, and that's much easier to do, obviously if you have a well pruned tree. And that netting provides that physical barrier between the insect on the outside and your ripening fruit on the inside of the net. And it's been a very successful way of protecting your crop insecticide free.

Drew Radford:

It does sound a great way of avoiding insecticides and obviously achieving the important outcome of keeping these things out of your garden, but it's a bigger picture than that though isn't it? Like the home garden management has a flow onto the entire industry, I'd imagine.

Bronwyn Koll:

Yep. The fruit growing industry, well here in the Yarra Valley and like places around the rest of Australia, we need people to work on those farms. And most of those people live nearby to the farms and we live in houses and we all love to have gardens. It's the great Australian dream to have some peaches and some nectarines and maybe some tomatoes in the veggie patch. We want to be able to produce fruit in our home garden. And yes, home garden management or lack thereof can have an impact on commercial horticulture, but it can actually just have as big a impact on their own production in their backyard and their neighbour's backyard and their neighbour's backyard. So, the big picture that you are talking about, we call area wide management and it's really important to get the home gardener, the community garden, the council roadsides, the public areas that have beautiful ornamental fruit trees as well as that commercial fruit grower all on the same page, working together to manage this problem.

Drew Radford:

Bronwyn, when's it important to take action against Queensland Fruit Fly?

Bronwyn Koll:

My answer to that one is yesterday. We all should have been doing more for a very long time. There's something that you can do each season in your garden to take action against fruit fly, but you don't always have to be in your garden to take action against fruit fly. You might be a good teacher. You might be a good role model in your community. You could be sharing awareness and prevention techniques with other people. So, there are multiple jobs or ways that you can help your community fight fruit fly. If we're going to be specific about what you can do in your garden, wintertime is a fantastic time to start and do your planning. Do all your pruning so that your fruit trees and your veggie gardens are going to be well managed throughout the season. Springtime, the best thing you can do is put some fruit fly traps up and these can help give you an indication of whether fruit fly is active or not active yet.

And you can also, if you know that you're in a fruit fly area, use fruit fly bait, which is a targeted food lure that the Queensland Fruit Fly love to go and consume, but there's an insecticide in there, more often than not, an organic insecticide. So, that's a good strategy to start weekly in late spring. In Northern Victoria, it's probably more important to start a bit earlier. And in Southern Victoria, we can afford to start a little bit later in spring, but again, it's dependent on the pressure that you know of in your area. So, it's all about understanding your environment around you. So, that's trapping, that's baiting.

And then, the last one that we talked about earlier was netting. It's really important to have your fruit fly nets in good order. So, stitching up any rips or tears, making sure they're not stuck up with sticks, and making sure that they are going to fit over the fruit trees that you have. And I would put insect netting out on my fruit trees after the flowers are finished. And just when that fruit started to set into little fruitlets. I'd like to get my netting all on well before the fruit starts to increase in size. And I'd like to make sure 100% my nets are on well before that fruit starts to change colour because that's when the fruit flies are most interested in our fruit.

During the summer, it's really important to pick all the fruit and prevent it from actually reaching the ground, taking that fruit inside and making sure that it's not affected by fruit fly. And even at the end of the season, it's important to go around and pick anything that you've missed. And throughout that harvest period, it's important to go around, then pick anything up that has fallen on the ground. We don't want to have lots of fruit, ripe fruit lying around the garden, because we don't want to attract the pest to our garden.

Drew Radford:

Bronwyn, you mentioned a couple of things there such as the fruit fly trap and bait. Are these things that are easy to get hold of?

Bronwyn Koll:

Most garden centres carry them. I've noticed during lockdown that some advertised online, you can always have a look on the internet and contact the producers of the traps directly and find out where their retail contact is. There are even some community organizations that are buying in fruit fly traps in bulk and then reselling them at cost. So, they're an affordable option for you to put in your garden.

Drew Radford:

Bronwyn, you mentioned there some community organisations. How can we all work together to stop Queensland Fruit Fly?

Bronwyn Koll:

We have a motto here in the Yarra Valley and that's about early detection and rapid response. We're fortunate that we have this long winter break and seemingly very little pressure over that colder spring period. And I think speaking for the whole of Australia or the whole of Victoria, there is going to be a quiet period in winter. So, working together as a community and having that annual plan of what to do when, that's a lot of knowledge and that knowledge, not everyone has. So, community organisations can help by raising the awareness of the fruit fly problem, being able to catch it early, and helping people get organized early to be that step ahead of this pest. I think community organisations are a fantastic place for the knowledge of fruit fly management to sit because people trust other people in their community. And there's really good success stories of people that have tried fruit fly management and prevention, and they can then share that with their neighbors or their friends at their community organisation. Also, community gardens are a fantastic place for sharing knowledge about all fruit and vegetable production. So, we actually have got some really good relationships with supporting our community gardens.

Drew Radford:

Bronwyn, you shared a lot of great information. Is there any final word you'd like to leave urban gardeners with in terms of looking out for and managing Queensland Fruit Fly?

Bronwyn Koll:

I think the most important thing for managing Queensland Fruit Fly is that we acknowledge that it is a risk and that we are all prepared to do our bit. It's not the government's job. It's not the council's job. It really is everyone that owns a bit of land has a lot of responsibilities of managing that land so that it doesn't impact other people. And as a land owner manager, I'd like to know that I'm doing my bit. So, I have fruit fly traps up and I pick my fruit regularly and that's all I have to do as a land manager in my region. But if I was living in a fruit fly region, I'd really like to know that my efforts are being multiplied by my neighbours because if I don't manage fruit fly, the fruit fly that I've been harboring on my property could go over the fence to my neighbours backyard and ruin their efforts.

And I think it's about having respect for all the other people in your community. So, know that you are doing your bit helping people who can't. For example, if I'm not going to be around over summer when my peaches are ready, I'd like to be able to invite my neighbour to come and pick those peaches and they can have that bounty for helping me out. We've got to be able to work together to share the knowledge and help each other and really work on this as a community. And we do that by starting to get things right in our own backyards.

Drew Radford:

Bronwyn Koll, you speak very passionately about this. You've got a great deal of knowledge. The Yarra Valley is clearly benefiting from all your efforts. Thank you for joining us on this Urban Plant Health Network Podcast to share your insights on how to combat this annoying pest the Queensland Fruit Fly.

Bronwyn Koll:

Thanks, Drew.