

Banana spider mite

What is banana spider mite?

Banana spider mite (*Tetranychus piercei*) is an exotic spider mite that attacks a range of tropical fruit crops overseas, including banana. It is also known as banana leaf mite or banana red mite.

The banana spider mite is one of many spider mites commonly found on tropical plants throughout Asia. Spider mites are tiny insects, almost microscopic – about the same size as the full-stop at the end of this sentence. Although tiny, these mites can cause devastating damage to banana plants. Banana spider mites mainly attack banana leaves, delaying fruit ripening and reducing yields.

Banana spider mite is closely related to the two-spotted mite (*Tetranychus urticae*), which is already present in Australia. Banana spider mites produce silky, white webbing similar to a spider's web, while two-spotted spider does not.

What do the symptoms look like?

Banana spider mite feeding produces small brown spots, initially on the under-surface, of mature banana leaves. As mite populations increase, damaged portions of the leaf enlarge and finally the whole underside of the leaf becomes reddish-brown, the upper surface turns yellow and the entire leaf becomes necrotic and dry. Serious infestations result in arrested plant growth, reduced quality and yield, as well as a delayed harvest.

Banana spider mites spin webs that resemble spiders' webs.



Don Wilkers

Close up of an adult spider mite



Jeff Daniells

Spider mite damage on banana leaves

What does the banana spider mite look like?

It is very difficult to see individual spider mites, even with a hand lens and almost impossible to distinguish by physical characters from two-spotted mites. Under a microscope adults are dark red in colour and range in length from 0.3–0.5mm. The eggs are creamy white.

What do I look for?

Silky threads, that look similar to a spider's web, associated with reddish-brown mite damage on the underside of leaves. Check carefully to make sure it's not actually a web belonging to a spider.

What can it be confused with?

Two-spotted spider mite is sometimes called banana spider mite when it attacks bananas in Australia.

What distinguishes banana and two-spotted spider mites?

Only banana spider mite produces webbing.

How is it spread?

Adults and nymphs are capable of crawling short distances, but can be carried much greater distances by humans, wind, insects or birds.

Where is it now?

This pest is present throughout Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.

Banana spider mite has not established in any mainland production areas of Australia. However, its presence in nearby Papua New Guinea puts Australia at high risk, as the pest could potentially move into the northern parts of Australia, either carried by people on plant material across Torres Strait, or blown on the wind.

This mite is capable of surviving and reproducing across a wide range of temperatures. All commercial banana growing areas in Australia fall within the banana spider mites' natural climatic range.

Establishment would most likely occur in tropical or subtropical conditions.

How can I protect my farm from banana spider mites?

Check your farm frequently for the presence of new pests and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common banana pests, so you can tell if you see something different.

If you see anything unusual, call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

**EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE
1800 084 881**

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