Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Factsheet: melon thrips (Thrips palmi)

March 2026

Status in law

Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales)

Melon thrips is a quarantine pest for Great Britain. It is not present in Great Britain. There are strict plant health regulations to prevent its introduction and spread.

It’s a notifiable pest. This means you must report it if you suspect its presence.

Northern Ireland

Melon thrips is a quarantine pest for Northern Ireland. It is not present in Northern Ireland. There are strict plant health regulations to prevent its introduction and spread.

It’s a notifiable pest. This means you must report it if you suspect its presence.

Detecting melon thrips

What to look for

Feeding damage

Adults and larvae pierce plant cells and feed on the contents. This causes:

- silvering on leaves, fruit and flowers
- scarring or deformation of fruits
- leaf deformation or yellowing

They often feed in groups and can build up to large populations under suitable conditions.

Adults

Adult melon thrips appear almost entirely yellow.

They are very small, measuring about one millimetre (mm). This makes them hard to detect. Feeding damage is likely to be spotted first.

Larvae

Melon thrips larvae are creamy-yellow in colour. They look similar to adults but are wingless.

Larvae can be found on any above-ground part of the plant.

Like adults, their feeding causes silvery scarring, leaf damage and deformation.

Pupae

Melon thrips larvae usually drop to the soil to pupate. The pupal stages are sedentary and do not feed but can move if disturbed.

Pupae can still sometimes be found on above-ground plant parts.

Eggs

Eggs are laid within plant tissue, such as leaves, flowers or fruit.

They are embedded in the plant and not visible to the naked eye.

Affected plants

Melon thrips feed on a wide variety of plants. It has been recorded on more than 200 plant species in over 36 families.

It is recognised as a major pest of plants in the Cucurbitaceae and Solanaceae families. It commonly feeds on:

- bell pepper / chilli pepper (Capsicum annuum)
- chrysanthemum (Chrysanthemum spp.)
- melon (Cucumis melo)
- pumpkin / gourds (Cucurbita spp.)
- cyclamen (Cyclamen)
- soybean (Glycine max)
- cotton (Gossypium spp.)
- sunflower (Helianthus annuus)
- tobacco (Nicotiana tabacum)
- orchids (Orchidaceae)
- common bean (Phaseolus vulgaris)
- sesame (Sesamum indicum)
- tomato (Solanum lycopersicum)
- aubergine (Solanum melongena)
- potato (Solanum tuberosum)
- black-eyed pea (Vigna unguiculata)

Similar pests

Melon thrips can be confused with other yellow, or mostly yellow, thrips present in the UK. These include:

- honeysuckle thrips (Thrips flavus)
- onion thrips (Thrips tabaci)
- western flower thrips (Frankliniella occidentalis)

Melon thrips can only be distinguished from other thrips species with certainty by laboratory examination.

Potential impact on the UK

It is extremely important that melon thrips does not enter or spread within the UK.

If it became established in the UK, it could cause serious economic damage to a broad range of glasshouse crops.

Feeding by adults and larvae leads to:

- silvery leaf and flower scarring
- leaf distortion
- fruit scarring
- plant weakening

Numbers can increase rapidly under the right conditions, causing severe infestation. At 25°C, the life cycle takes around 18 days. Heavy infestations can lead to plant death.

Its feeding can cause direct impacts, but it can also transmit several damaging tospoviruses. These include:

- groundnut bud necrosis virus (Orthotospovirus arachinecrosis)
- melon yellow spot virus (Orthotospovirus meloflavi)
- watermelon silver mottle virus (Orthotospovirus citrullomaculosi)

It may be able to transmit other economically important viruses, such as tomato spotted wilt virus (Orthotospovirus tomatomaculae). This is currently uncertain.

Presence and spread

Where it's present

Melon thrips likely originated in southern Asia. It is now found in many countries in Asia, the Pacific islands, and the Caribbean.

It is also present in some parts of North, Central and South America, Africa and Australia.

It continues to expand its range but is limited by cooler temperatures and arid conditions.

In the UK, it is unlikely to survive outside of protected cultivation.

Notable interceptions and outbreaks

Melon thrips is not currently found in Europe, but past outbreaks occurred in protected crops. These include:

- several outbreaks in the Netherlands between 1988 and 1995
- one outbreak in southern England in 2000
- one outbreak in Germany in 2014

All were successfully eradicated.

In 2004, it was reported on 2 outdoor kiwi crops in Portugal. It was not found again in subsequent annual surveys.

It is regularly intercepted at the UK border on plants, cut flowers and produce in trade.

How it spreads

Melon thrips spreads through movement of infested plant material. This includes plants for planting, cut flowers and produce.

Eggs, larvae, pupae and adults may be present on traded material. Pupae may also be present in growing media or soil.

Once introduced to an area or glasshouse, it spreads within crops as adults and larvae move and feed.

Reducing the risk

To reduce the risk of melon thrips being introduced to the UK, you can:

- check with plant suppliers that plants are free from melon thrips as part of commercial contracts
- ensure any known host plants, such as orchids, are treated before import
- keep imported material for growing-on separate until thoroughly inspected
- visually monitor crops during the growing season using blue sticky traps, which you should check regularly

What to do if you suspect melon thrips

You must immediately report the sighting to the relevant authority.

Isolate the affected plants

Keep any suspected infested plants separate to prevent spread within your growing area.

Limit movement of plant material

Avoid moving plants, plant debris or growing media from the affected area until advised by plant health authorities.

Report the suspected sighting

England and Wales

Contact the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) at the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Email: planthealth.info@apha.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 1000 313

For finds on trees in the wider environment, report through Tree Alert.

Or get in touch with your local APHA Plant Health and Seeds Inspector, if you know who they are.

Scotland

Contact the relevant team depending on where you've found it:

- **for finds on agricultural crops**, visit https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/contact-us for the contact details of your local Rural Payments and Inspections Division (RPID)
- **for finds on non-agricultural crops**, email the Scottish Government's Horticulture and Marketing Unit (HMU) at hort.marketing@gov.scot
- **for finds on trees in the wider environment**, report through Tree Alert

Northern Ireland

Contact the Plant Health Inspection Branch at Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Email: planthealth@daera-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 200 7847

For finds on trees in the wider environment, report through TreeCheck.