Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) IPM in Blueberries

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Spotted wing drosophila (SWD) represents a major challenge to producers of soft skinned fruit crops in the northeastern US and elsewhere. Blueberries are a high risk host for SWD and therefore especially vulnerable. The arrival of SWD in the Northeast in 2011 prompted considerable research activity to develop strategies for its management. Although more research is needed, there is enough information available to recommend a set of best management practices (BMPs) that emphasizes the use of multiple tactics including monitoring, cultural control, and chemical control.

This document summarizes BMPs with a focus on blueberries. Production practices differ among cultivars and this may influence which BMPs are relevant. Later maturing varieties are the most vulnerable.

About SWD and Its Impact

Scientific name: Drosophila suzukii (Matsumura)

Common name: Spotted wing drosophila

Distribution: Originally from Asia, SWD is now established throughout North and South America and Europe.

Invasion: SWD was first detected in the North American continent in California in 2008 and rapidly spread north into Oregon, Washington, and western Canada, south into Florida, and now has been found in much of the USA. SWD was first reported in the Northeast in the late summer of 2011. In 2012, SWD first appeared in late June/early July, causing widespread injury to berry crops. A similar pattern was observed in 2013 and 2014; now SWD typically first shows up anytime from late May to early July in most of the Northeast.

Susceptible crops and wild hosts: On a diversified farm where several susceptible crops are grown, it may be more challenging to control SWD. The timing of fruit harvests for all susceptible crops, as well as the fruiting season of wild

Spotted Wing Drosophila Identification

A dried specimen, male SWD. Note the characteristic dark spot on the leading edge of each wing.

A male SWD has two sets of “combs” on each foreleg that show up as black dots under hand lens. These help them clasp the female during mating.

A dried specimen, female SWD. Note, she doesn’t have spots on her wings.

The female’s saw-toothed ovipositor, shown highly magnified, sets her apart from other vinegar flies and allows her to lay eggs into ripening fruit.

Above photos by Ashfaq Sial, University of Georgia; ovipositor photo at right by Juliet Carroll, Cornell University.
hosts should be tracked in order to better time and optimize SWD management on the farm.

Brambles are particularly susceptible, especially fall-bearing cultivars. Blueberries are also a preferred crop host, with later-maturing varieties more vulnerable than early season varieties. Female SWD lay eggs in blueberries from the time of first coloring through harvest. June-bearing strawberries are less susceptible to injury than day-neutral varieties harvested later in summer. Elderberries are also susceptible as well as cherries and plums. Nectarines and peaches can also be attacked if permitted to tree ripen, and under a low-spray management system. Some thin-skinned cultivars of grapes are also vulnerable, though most are not. However, damaged grapes are susceptible to SWD and other Drosophilids, often exacerbating problems with sour rot. SWD uses the fruit of a number of wild species of plants to reproduce in mid to late summer such as dogwood, bush honeysuckle, wild Ribes, buckthorn, and pokeweed.

**Potential for economic impact:** SWD has caused significant impact, especially for mid-summer and later-maturing fruit when populations tend to increase. Risk of marketing fruit contaminated with SWD larvae can be high, resulting in rejected shipments and consumer complaints. Growers have resorted to frequent pesticide applications thereby increasing economic and environmental costs as well as disrupting established IPM programs for other insect pests.

**Identification and biology:** SWD looks superficially like your everyday vinegar fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*, of genetics fame, but vinegar flies are generally not a serious economic threat to fruit growers. Female vinegar flies typi-
cally lay eggs in damaged and/or overripe fruit and hence, are mostly just a nuisance. On the other hand, female SWD have very robust ovipositors (the rear end portion of the fly used for egg laying) and lay their eggs in ripening and ripe, marketable fruit before it is harvested, leading to damage and contamination with larvae.

Adult SWD are 2–3 mm in length, with red eyes, a tan-colored body with darker bands on the rounded abdomen. Males have characteristic single spots at the leading edge of the tip of the wing and two dark stripes on their front legs. Females lack wing and leg spots, but are distinguished by the robust, serrated ovipositor (visible under magnification). There are three instars of larvae, which are white, nondescript and legless maggots, about 0.5 to 2 mm long.

Development rate is dependent on temperature, the optimal range falling between 68°F and 77°F; so cool temperatures in the spring will result in longer periods between life stages and warm temperatures in the summer will result in shorter periods between stages. Very hot temperatures and very cold temperatures will also slow the rate of development. Adult flies live for 30–60 days and a female can lay as many as 380 eggs in her lifetime.

SWD is most abundant from mid-summer through the fall in the Northeast. Surveys for adult SWD indicate they are at very low numbers in the spring (usually undetectable), first appear in mid-June, and build through the summer, peaking in August and September. Later in the fall in response to lower temperatures and shorter days, adult SWD cease to reproduce. To what extent SWD successfully overwinters in the Northeast is under investigation, but results so far indicate that very few make it through the winter in a normal year. Adults do overwinter in slightly warmer areas such as New Jersey.

**Best Management Practices for SWD on Blueberries in the Northeastern USA**

SWD presents a major economic threat to blueberry production in the northeastern US and elsewhere. There are management practices, however, that can be used to help reduce its impact. Below we present information on management practices that, based on our current research results, can be used to mitigate the impact of SWD on blueberries. Recommended practices include monitoring, cultural methods, and chemical control methods.

**Monitoring Thresholds**

None established. Because there is no economic threshold for SWD, we are currently recommending a conservative approach. Any fly capture on your farm triggers protection of fields if berries are at a susceptible stage. If fruit are ripening or ripe and SWD flies are trapped, growers should: 1) continue monitoring to assess SWD distribution, 2) implement cultural controls where possible, 3) protect fruit through to harvest using registered insecticides, and 4) consider post-harvest controls including temperature treatment and soft-sorting machinery.

**Monitoring Adult SWD**

Monitoring adult SWD using baited traps can be helpful in deciding on when to initiate control tactics, although its usefulness in blueberries is dependent on cultivar and when fruit ripens to become susceptible. It makes the most sense that later-maturing varieties are more susceptible to SWD. Adult monitoring can provide a heads-up of infestation risk. Note that it is best to learn to identify the female SWD since females are often captured before the more obvious males are captured. However, monitoring for males can prove useful
when keeping in mind that females may have arrived already once males are caught. Identification of SWD flies becomes easier with practice, especially when using a hand lens or microscope. Given the potential for rapid population increase by SWD, active management through monitoring of flies and fruit infestation is needed until the end of harvest. This will allow rapid response to detections of SWD.

Traps baited with an actively fermenting yeast plus whole wheat flour solution placed in a separate, screened holding container within a larger trap that includes a drowning solution of apple cider vinegar and a drop of unscented soap that captures the SWD. The red and black contrasting colors attract SWD, as well. Many types and designs of traps are available. Place traps in a shaded location. Photo by Laura McDermott, Cornell University.

A trap for monitoring SWD. In the jar hangs a plastic cup containing a fermenting wheat flour dough that releases an attractant odor drawing the SWD in through the small holes. The jar has drowning solution of apple cider vinegar and a drop of unscented soap that captures the SWD. The red and black contrasting colors attract SWD, as well. Many types and designs of traps are available. Place traps in a shaded location. Photo by Laura McDermott, Cornell University.

lasting six weeks and using water plus a drop of unscented soap for the drowning solution.

Traps should be frequently checked, daily or at least once per week; see fact sheets for details on servicing traps. Daily checking of traps results in fewer fruit flies to sort through to find SWD. Although the commercial synthetic lures with water drowning solution are more selective than the fermenting baits, the lures are not very specific for SWD and therefore capture many different fruit flies and other insects. Research is ongoing to improve trap efficiency and develop a better early warning system.

**Monitoring for Fruit Infestations**

Monitoring for SWD larvae in ripe fruit is recommended on a regular (at least weekly) basis. This provides producers with real-time estimates of infestation risk and possibly information on the effectiveness of SWD management practices. Suspicious fruit can be inspected for larvae by performing a salt flotation, which will cause larvae to emerge from fruit. All methods use a saturated salt solution made from 1 cup (236 cc) table salt to 1 gal (3.8 liters) of warm water. This solution will kill the larvae. Results of the tests can be either: 1) yes/no SWD found, or 2) a count of SWD larvae can be quantified as, for example, 43 larvae/100 fruit. Quantifying SWD counts will provide an indication of SWD population growth or decline and a perspective on whether control measures are working.

Two days after SWD laid eggs in this blueberry, the skin has begun to wrinkle and a slight depression has formed as larvae feed on the fruit pulp.

Four days after SWD laid eggs in this blueberry, a dimple and tiny breathing holes, which may leak juice, have shown up in response to larvae feeding inside.

Six days after SWD laid eggs in this blueberry, it is virtually destroyed and the tiny breathing holes now show up as breaks in the skin. A third instar larva has exited the fruit to find a place to pupate.

Photos by Ashfaq Sial, University of Georgia.
In large-scale commercial fields, at least 1 quart of fruit or at least 100 fruit per block per harvest should be observed for infestation. A suggested method used in the Pacific Northwest was adapted for small-scale growers in “Guidelines for Checking Fruit for SWD Larvae in the Field” (http://blogs.cornell.edu/newfruit/files/2017/01/SaltFloatation-2kmt284.pdf). In this method it is easiest to see second and third instar (half to full-grown) larvae.

Another salt flotation method that is also fast and will isolate half grown or larger larvae (second or third instar) requires more equipment and may be easier to do indoors. Use a standard sample of 1 qt (~1 liter) of fruit per monitored field. You could use 1 pint (~0.5 liter) if you have a small planting. Place the field run, unsorted fruit sample in a shallow 8 × 12 in baking pan, and pour over 2 qt (2 liters) of warm salt water. Place a ¼” (6.4 mm) mesh hardware cloth that has been cut to fit the pan, over the berries and press down to gently massage the fruit to break the skins, without mashing them up. Place two pieces of round steel bars on top of the hardware cloth to weight down the fruit, and then wait about 10 minutes for any maggots to float to the surface.

A more accurate method, the filter method, takes a little more time, but will isolate even the smallest larvae and eggs. Use the same amount of fruit as above and place in a 2 gal Ziploc bag (or into two 1 gal bags). Gently press the berries to break the skins. Add salt water to cover the fruit in the bag(s), squeezing out the air to keep berries immersed, and stand the bags for about one hour in a plastic tub so they are upright. Bend a piece of ¼” hardware cloth in a large funnel, and pour the contents of the bag through the funnel into a reusable stainless steel coffee filter. Then rinse the empty bag and berries with a sprayer to wash off any remaining larvae into the stainless steel coffee filter. Use a strong hand lens or a dissecting microscope to count the larvae caught in the coffee filter. This method is detailed in: Van Timmerman, S., Diepenbrock, L.M., Bertone, M.A., Burrack, H.J., Isaacs, R. 2017. A filter method for improved monitoring of Drosophila suzukii (Diptera: Drosophilidae) larvae in fruit. Journal of Integrated Pest Management. 8(1):23; 1–7.

Berries can also be sampled using the standard boil test used by processors for blueberry maggot (Rhagoletis mendax) detection. To do this, cover a sample of berries with water and boil for one minute then pour the fruit and liquid onto a mesh-covered frame over a tray and mash the fruit with the back of a spoon. Lightly wash through with water and look in the tray for larvae. This method works very well for detecting SWD larvae, which are smaller than blueberry maggot. It should be noted that young blueberry maggot larvae are difficult to distinguish from SWD larvae, but specimens can be separated based on their shape, and the structure of the larva from features visible under a microscope. Although the boil test is used as a standard sampling method for checking fruit by processors, it would be better to detect any potential infestation in the field and control it before any infestation reaches the processor.

Fruit that appears sound but from which leaking juices are noticed can be a sign that SWD may be developing in the fruit. Dried drops of juice seen on leaves below a fruit cluster or on fruit in the field are also signs of possible SWD infestation, especially if no bird damage, cracking, or other obvious signs of damage are seen on the fruit.
• Recognizing Fruit Damaged by Spotted Wing Drosophila, *Drosophila suzukii* – USDA (http://neipmc.org/go/swdusda)

• Recognize Fruit Damage from Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) – Oregon State University (http://neipmc.org/go/swdosu)

Cultural Practices

Good sanitation is very important. Try to prevent the buildup of ripe and overripe fruit through clean picking and frequent harvests. Pruning plantings to create a more open canopy may help reduce habitat suitability for SWD adults and improve insecticide coverage. Fruit crops that mature earlier in the season may likely escape major damage.

1. **Resistant cultivars.** Plant resistance is a key component of pest management but unfortunately, all blueberries are generally susceptible to SWD. The one aspect that varies among cultivars that does affect risk is time of fruit ripening. As noted above, those cultivars that ripen later in the growing season may be at higher risk. However, this may depend on where you are located in the Northeast.

2. **Sanitation.** Excellent sanitation will reduce SWD populations. Fruit should be harvested frequently and completely to prevent the buildup of ripe and overripe fruit. Unmarketable fruit should be removed from the field and either frozen, “baked” in clear plastic bags placed in the sun, or disposed of in bags off-site. This will kill larvae, remove them from your crop, and prevent them from emerging as adults. If there is a large pile of cull fruit, these can also be solarized by placing 1–2 mil clear plastic sheeting over the pile in a sunny location and sealing well around the edge using soil. If possible, remove leftover fruit in waste piles to reduce SWD food resources.

3. **Canopy, weed, and water management.** Canopy, weed, and water management will make the environment less favorable for SWD. Prune to maintain an open canopy, increase sunlight, and reduce humidity. This will make plantings less attractive to SWD and will improve spray coverage. Repair leaking drip

Two male SWD walking on a blueberry, photographed in early September. SWD populations typically build to very high levels in late summer and early autumn. Photo by Tim Martinson, Cornell University.

Installing exclusion netting over hoops previously used for a high tunnel to protect blueberries. The 0.95 mm x 0.95 mm (80 gram weight) insect netting prevents SWD from gaining entry to the high tunnel. Care must be taken to prevent gaps and to exclude SWD when entering and exiting the high tunnel. The wooden frame will be used for a netted double entryway. Photo by Laura McDermott, Cornell University.

To hold down the exclusion netting on a frame, a spring wire channel lock system works well, as shown. Photo by Greg Loeb, Cornell University.
lines and avoid overhead irrigation when possible. Allow the ground and mulch surface to dry before irrigating. Higher catches in traps adjacent to fields where they remain wet longer, or are adjacent to creeks have been observed. Improving drainage, fixing irrigation leaks, and understanding what makes potential hot spots can all aid in SWD management.

4. Exclusion netting. If the planting includes late season varieties, consider using insect exclusion netting on these to protect fruit, if adaptable to your farming operation. If establishing a new planting, focus on early to mid-season varieties to minimize the need for SWD management. Research indicates that fine mesh netting (less than 1 mm in diameter) can be used to cover berry plantings and exclude SWD adults. In blueberries, where most of the research has been conducted, exclusion netting has minimized SWD infestation at a commercial scale for several seasons. See the following summary of the blueberry research, Riggs, D.I., Loeb, G., Hesler, S., and McDermott, L. 2016. Using insect netting on existing bird-netting support systems to exclude spotted wing drosophila (SWD) from a small scale commercial highbush blueberry planting. NY Fruit Quarterly (24):9–14. (http://nyshs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/McDermott-Pages-9-14-NYFQ-Book-Summer-2016.pdf).

5. Regular fruit sampling. Talk to your local cooperative extension agent about a monitoring program. Fruit can be inspected for evidence of larval feeding. Small holes in berries where the eggs were laid may leak juice when the berry is gently squeezed; this is especially diagnostic on blueberry. Fruit with small indents or bruises where the berry surface appears to have flattened or deflated may be damaged. Use salt flotation to check fruit for larval infestation. Suggested methods can be found above under, “Monitoring for Fruit Infestations.”

6. Removing wild hosts. Removing wild host plants that can harbor SWD such as wild grape, pokeberry, honeysuckle, nightshade, dogwood, spicebush, autumn olive, raspberry, blackberry, etc., near crop fields is another potential strategy, but again this approach has not been tested in our region. From our recent observations, presence of honeysuckle near fields is a predictor of more activity from SWD. A list of recorded non-crop host plants is posted online, “Noncrop Host Plants of Spotted Wing Drosophila in North America” by Michigan State University (https://www.canr.msu.edu/ipm/uploads/files/SWD/em9113.pdf).
7. Post-harvest practices. Cool berries immediately. Chilling berries immediately after harvest to 32°F–33°F will slow or stop the development of larvae and eggs in the fruit. The use of forced-air cooling will improve shelf life and reduce the berry temperature rapidly, thus slowing SWD development. U-Pick customers should be encouraged to follow this strategy to improve fruit quality at home.

8. Stay informed. Recommendations are subject to change based upon new information. Keep in touch with your local cooperative extension office with any questions.

Chemical Control
To manage SWD effectively without the use of exclusion netting, insecticides will be needed. There are six key factors that play into the decisions about when and what to apply when insecticide use is considered: 1) SWD has been caught in the area; 2) the crop is susceptible; 3) the fruit is ripening, ripe, or harvest is underway; 4) SWD larvae have been found in fruit; 5) the need to protect pollinators from insecticides; and 6) the market destination. Some export markets do not allow insecticide residues of the same types or levels as allowed in the US.

Many states have SWD monitoring programs or you can monitor for SWD. Servicing SWD traps and scanning through the insects caught in the traps is time-consuming and tedious. Traps in a local area or county region can provide some sense of whether SWD is on your farm. Recent research estimated a trap sample should cover about 6.7 acres. Therefore, it may be best to routinely sample fruit using the salt flotation method, especially if you have a large farm or do not trap with this intensity.

Insecticide treatments should begin when either regional monitoring alerts about the first SWD trap catch or when highly susceptible fruit crops begin to ripen. Treatments should be applied at least every seven days and repeated in the event of rain. Choose the most effective insecticides with pre-harvest intervals that work for your picking schedule. Rotate insecticides according to their modes of action.

Blueberries are susceptible to infestation from the time when fruit begin to color, with susceptibility increasing as ripeness increases. Many of these insecticides have a short pre-harvest interval (PHI), but reentry and picking might still be problematic if the planting is open for U-Pick seven days per week. For U-Pick operations, it may prove helpful to close off an area and not allow entry within the PHI after treatment, or to close for 1 day per week when treatments can be applied and the PHI observed. For fruit destined for a processor there may be zero tolerance for SWD infestation.

This can create significant challenges when trying to reduce the number of insecticide applications. If infested fruit is detected via salt flotation, it may be possible to completely harvest all ripening fruit, spray an insecticide to protect the developing fruit and maintain insecticide protection while the next flush of fruit ripens.

Numerous insecticides are labeled for SWD control, including several that have recently received 2(ee) recommendation approvals. Check with your local cooperative extension service for products labeled against SWD. Chemical control primarily targets the adults but recent research shows that some materials also kill young larvae already inside the fruit. Due to SWD’s high reproductive rate, short generation time, and mobility it is generally necessary to apply insecticides multiple times (at least weekly) during the harvest season, especially on mid- to late-season varieties.

Insecticides that are effective and labeled for use on blueberries are organophosphates, carbamates, pyrethroids, spinosyns, and diamides. It is important to rotate insecticides with different modes of action (MoA, IRAC group, see next paragraph on pesticide resistance management) to prevent insecticide resistance from developing in SWD. Insecticide registration status changes yearly, so always check the label to verify it can be used on blueberry. For instance, specific insecticides for SWD in blueberries are listed in the Cornell Pest Management Guidelines for Berry Crops (http://cropandpestguides.cce.cornell.edu) and the Commercial Blueberry Pest Control Recommendations for New Jersey (http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=e265), which are updated yearly.

Pesticide Resistance Management
The arsenal of pest management products for berry crops in the US (and New York in particular) is relatively small compared to other large acreage crops such as wheat, corn, soybeans, potatoes, etc. Given the smaller complement of products available for berry insect management, it is imperative for growers to use them wisely to prevent development of resistance in berry insect and mite populations as well as to prevent exceeding maximum residue limits (MRLs) for fruit exported to other countries. Resistance occurs when an insecticide or acaricide (miticide) is overused or misused against a particular pest species. These improper usages lead to selection of resistant forms of the pest, which then dominate the population over time, shifting it from susceptible to resistant. Not only does resistance develop to the specific product that has been overused or misused, it also develops to other products with the same mode of action (MoA, similar mechanism of toxicity or control on the pest.
species). To prevent or delay the development of resistance in pest populations it is advisable to use alternations, sequences, or rotations of products from different IRAC (Insecticide Resistance Action Committee) MoA groups. In all cases, be sure to follow label instructions.

**Behavioral and Biological Control**

Research characterizing attractants and repellents for attract-and-kill and push-pull technologies, testing biopesticides, and identifying insect parasitoids and predators for managing SWD is underway. The use of hummingbird enrichment in berry plantings has shown promise, providing, in one study, a 59% reduction in SWD adults caught in the hummingbird feeder zone.

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### Resources


3. For assistance with diagnosing highbush blueberry problems, use the online Berry Diagnostic Tool at [http://blogs.cornell.edu/berrytool/](http://blogs.cornell.edu/berrytool/) or contact your local cooperative extension office for assistance.


6. SWD Distribution Maps are available as well on the Cornell Fruit Resources Page ([http://fruit.cornell.edu/spottedwing/distribution/](http://fruit.cornell.edu/spottedwing/distribution/)), which includes a map of New York with confirmed trap captures according to county.

7. SWD Resource Database from the Northeastern IPM Center: [http://neipmc.org/go/searchswd](http://neipmc.org/go/searchswd)

8. Spotted Wing Drosophila fact sheet – NYS IPM Program: [https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/42883.3](https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/42883.3)


10. Spotted Wing Drosophila blog – NYS IPM Program: [http://blogs.cornell.edu/swd1/](http://blogs.cornell.edu/swd1/)

11. Spotted Wing Drosophila: A Key Pest of Small Fruits in New Jersey: [https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1246/](https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1246/)