

## Weeping Fig Thrips (*Gynaikothrips uzeli*)

**Introduced:** 2003 (Miami-Dade County).

**Current Infestation:** Primarily southern Florida with scattered infestations throughout the state. Also reported in Mississippi and Tennessee.

**Description/Biology:** The weeping fig thrips is a relatively large thrips. It is closely related to and strongly resembles the Cuban laurel thrips, *Gynaikothrips ficorum*. The eggs are cylindrical, smooth and translucent. The young larvae are translucent white, oblong or “cigar” shaped, with red eyes.



Adults are less than 1/7 inch long (2.5 to 3.6 mm) and dark brown or black.

The adults feed on the upper surface of young expanding leaves causing the leaves to curl inward or fold into a pocket in which the adult will lay eggs and the immature thrips will develop.



**Seasonality:** In southern Florida, the weeping fig thrips can be found all year.

**Hosts:** *Ficus* spp. and one unrelated plant are the only reported hosts of this pest. The weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina*) is the only plant on which it is known to complete its life cycle. Other recorded hosts include *F. obtusa*, *F. pilosa*, *F. microcarpa*, and *Macaranga* sp.

**Importance:** This pest can cause serious damage to a popular landscape and interiorscape ornamental plant, *Ficus benjamina*, and it appears to be spreading to more areas throughout the southeast. Once established in an interiorscape, eradication is very difficult.

**Damage:** The thrips feed on expanding leaves causing purplish red spots on the lower leaf surface. The leaves become curled and galled, and prematurely drop.



# Weeping Fig Thrips

**Management:** The weeping fig thrips only attack the new foliage of *Ficus* plants. Inspect plants regularly for symptoms of infestation. Treatments must be applied to protect leaves while they are expanding. Once damage has occurred and populations are developing in tightly curled leaves, adequate coverage with insecticides is difficult. There are no specific recommendations for this thrips, however, pesticide recommendations for other types of thrips feeding on ornamental plants may work.

Homeowner and Professional - Infestations in the landscape do not always need management. This is particularly true when there is a large hedge of weeping figs. The damage is not usually extensive enough to require control and the populations of the pest fluctuate throughout the year. Plants recover from the damage.

There are numerous natural enemies, particularly predators, that feed on this pest. These include green lacewings, spiders, lady beetles, predatory mites and thrips and a minute pirate bug (*Montandoniola moraguesi*). This particular

bug is well established in southern Florida and appears to be an effective biological control agent.



If management is required, the pest population can be reduced by pruning and disposing of the infested foliage.

Grower - Insecticide treatment should be initiated to protect the developing foliage. It has been reported that most neonicotinoid insecticides (i.e. Safari, Discus, Marathon, Flagship, and TriStar) applied to the foliage provided seven days of control. Drenching with some of these products may provide longer protection. Foliar application of bifenthrin (Talstar) provided more than two weeks of residual control of the adults. Acephate (Orthene) applied as a drench also provided excellent control. Other products such as Conserve, Avid and Azatin have provided moderate to poor control.

The minute pirate bug mentioned in the “Homeowner and Professional” section is an effective control agent for the grower’s operation. In tests conducted with insecticides, it was shown to be as effective as most insecticides. Monitor for the presence of this natural enemy and use insecticides selectively in order to maintain the populations of the natural enemy.

## Websites:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN599>

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=8045&page=1>

[www.fcla.edu/FlaEnt/fe88p538.pdf](http://www.fcla.edu/FlaEnt/fe88p538.pdf)

## Authors:

Catharine Mannion, UF/IFAS, TREC Homestead  
Adrian Hunsberger, UF/IFAS, Miami-Dade Extension  
Kim Gabel, UF/IFAS, Monroe Extension  
Eileen Buss, UF/IFAS, Entomology Dept., Gainesville  
Lyle Buss, UF/IFAS, Entomology Dept., Gainesville

Photo Credits: UF/IFAS, Holly Glenn and Lyle Buss

August 2006