

ASK BROWNIE

It is a problem I and a lot of other people who have citrus trees in the Maleny area experienced this year. I have grown them for years in my home orchard and they are usually trouble-free, just fertilising at the appropriate times and some annual pruning. However, this year we have had almost no fruit. The problem could be caused by a small insect noticed after fruit set. We would like to take preventive measures next autumn, so any suggestions would be appreciated.

*John Lewis,
Maleny*

Fruit-piercing moth



Nearly everyone had citrus problems early in the season leading to a poor harvest for many. The main culprit was the fruit-piercing moth – a large, stout-bodied native moth with a long feeding tube that they use to pierce the skin of a variety of fruits and feed on the fruit juices.

Once pierced, the hole is an opening for bacteria and fungi to infect the fruit, creating bad spots and spoiling the fruit.

They have a liking for most types of citrus but also attack banana, guava, kiwifruit, lychee, mango, pineapple and even melons, tomatoes and passionfruit in bad years.

Although they are around for the whole year, the worst period for moth activity is late summer/early autumn. This last season seemed to be the worst we've had for quite a few years.

However, your problem appears to be something different as you say there was a small insect after fruit set and you had little fruit develop.

Without a description or photo, it's hard to give a definitive answer.

This was a particularly active year for red-shouldered beetles so it may have been these you were seeing.

They tend not to cause too much of a problem for citrus, other than eating some of the leaves.

So it probably wasn't them causing your fruiting failure.

I suspect you will never find the answer. Sometimes local conditions create a poor fruit-set season – and maybe it was just your turn.

However, take heart as your citrus should be bursting into flower at the moment (or just finished) and so keep an eye on anything unusual again and let me know.



Gamgee trap



Bird netting

Just keep doing your usual – water well when dry, feed four times a year, prune after cropping (but not now as you'll prune off the next season's citrus).

For those who had fruit-piercing moth problems the only real solution is to net or bag the fruit. There isn't any lure bait or deterrent that gives a consistent result. The Department of Agriculture recommends going out at night with a torch and squashing them ... their eyes glow bright red in torchlight, so are easy to find that way.

Or you might like to try a Gamgee trap, developed by local fruit grower Fred Gamgee in the 1990s. It's a netting funnel-type trap. To learn more, see the YouTube video

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SCjVJwRclK. Fred Gamgee only passed away in June at the age of 94.