One of the most frustrating aspects of gardening is when you discover that your favorite fruit is full of “worms” or otherwise damaged to the point that it’s inedible. Once the damage is done, all you can do is to remove the infested fruit from the tree and ground, and dispose of them.

But prevention is key! One of the most effective ways to prevent insects from damaging your fruit is to use, of all things, paper lunch bags or even panty hose.

There are several different insect pests which infest some of our fruit trees. Guava and loquat are commonly infested with Caribbean fruit flies, papaya with papaya fruit flies, and annonas (sugar apple, custard apple, sour sop, and sweet sop) with a seed boring wasp.

Adult fruit flies are about ½” long. The female appears to be “stinging” the fruit when she’s laying her eggs.

A papaya fruit fly laying eggs. The white substance is the latex-like sap from the fruit.
These insects look for unripe fruit as a host for their progeny. The female has a tube-like appendage called an ovipositor used to pierce the skin of young fruit to lay her eggs. That’s why it’s hard to tell if your fruit is infested because the immature insects are inside the fruit.

As soon as fruit has set (the flower petals have fallen and the fruit is becoming visible), you’ll need to protect the fruit. Envelop each fruit in a paper lunch bag or even panty hose (knee high hose are easy to use). Even fruit growers bag the fruit of vulnerable crops. Avoid using plastic bags since moisture will build up which can cause your fruit to rot.

*If you are using paper bags or nylon stockings, use a twist tie, string or masking tape to close the neck of the bag or stockings around the branch. The bag or hose can stay on the fruit until the fruit are about mature size. At that point, the protectant can be removed.*

To protect papaya from the papaya fruit fly, try using a laundry wash bag. Choose bags that have a fairly tight weave so that the fly can’t get her ovipositor through. Laundry wash bags are available at grocery stores, bedding supply (linen) stores, and some discount stores. Although not as easy to do, you could use paper grocery bags or even newspaper to envelop each papaya fruit. If you use newspapers to wrap each fruit, you’ll need to seal open seams with masking tape to keep the flies out. Keep in mind that the fruit will enlarge over time so you will need loosely wrap each fruit or rewrap the papaya as the fruit develops.

For clusters of fruit, such as loquat, use a large paper bag or use laundry wash bags to encase multiple fruits.
Have you ever wondered why your annona fruit turned black and dried out (mummified)? Well, it was infested with a small wasp called the annona seed boring wasp. This insect can’t sting you but can ruin your annona crop. Once the immature wasp has finished developing inside the seeds, the adult eats its way out of the fruit and you will see a small hole where it emerged. Because of this injury, fruit rotting fungi infect the fruit which will cause the fruit to turn black and dry.

If you weren’t able to protect your fruit in time, as soon as you see your annona fruit with holes, remove them and dispose in the garbage.

If you have any questions, please contact the University of Florida/Miami-Dade County Extension office (305) 248-3311 x 228

Please visit our web site for updates, workshops, and publications
http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Papaya fruit fly
http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/fruit/tropical/papaya_fruit_fly.htm

Caribbean fruit fly
http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/fruit/tropical/caribbean_fruit_fly.htm

Annona seed borer wasp
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig166

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