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Protect South Texas Citrus: USDA Urges Residents to Protect Local Fruit from Invasive Pests

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WASHINGTON, April 23, 2024 – South Texas citrus is under attack and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is asking residents for their help. Texas citrus in the Lower Rio Grande Valley is at risk of being infested by invasive and damaging fruit flies. APHIS and Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) employees in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Webb, Willacy, and Zapata counties are inspecting and surveying fruit trees in residential yards and commercial properties for signs of invasive plant pests, to protect our food supply and agricultural economy. Residents can help by cooperating with surveys and taking steps to keep invasive fruit flies off their backyard fruit. Report signs of invasive fruit flies and citrus diseases to local agriculture officials to protect grapefruit, sweet and sour orange, key lime, sweet lemon, and other types of fruit in the area.

The main threat this season is an invasive fruit fly (*Anastrepha ludens*) that is native to Mexico and Central America. While this fruit fly is harmless to people and pets, it feeds on more than 40 kinds of fruits and vegetables. Invasive fruit fly larvae, more commonly known as maggots, can infest homegrown fruit, and mature into adult flies, which can then fly into commercial areas and spoil new harvests.

Texas State Plant Health Director Stuart Kuehn highlighted what's at stake.

"Commercial citrus brought in more than \$66 million in revenue to Texas last year. It's a significant part of our agricultural economy in the State and something we should protect," he said. "We hope residents will continue to do their part to protect our harvests this year."

Agricultural personnel will place and service traps to monitor citrus trees and find new fruit fly introductions as early as possible. Residents can help agricultural officials eradicate invasive fruit flies by allowing them property access to inspect trees and hang traps. If fruit flies are detected, agricultural officials may also ask for permission to conduct treatments. Surveyors will have official USDA or TDA credentials.

Texans can take additional steps to protect fruit from invasive pests. Fruit flies are drawn to ripening fruit. Follow these steps to avoid spreading them to new areas:

1. Remove all mature citrus fruit and any other host material, including fruit that has fallen to the ground, from your property as soon as possible.
2. Eat the fruit or double bag it and put it in the trash.
3. Don't compost fruit or vegetables from [quarantined areas](#). (Type "map" in the search box.)
4. If you live in a citrus disease quarantine area, dispose of tree trimmings in plastic bags. Double bag the branches and other debris and dispose of them with your household waste.
5. Don't move or mail homegrown fruit or plants.
6. Be cautious purchasing fruit from social media or backyard vendors.
7. Before entering the United States from another country, declare agricultural products—including fruit—to [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#).
8. Report signs of invasive fruit flies or citrus diseases, by calling USDA at:
 - (956) 421-4041 in Cameron, Webb, and Willacy Counties;
 - (956) 632-5300 for fruit flies and (956) 205-7702 for citrus diseases in Hidalgo County;
 - or (956) 726-2225 in Webb or Zapata Counties.



For more information on invasive insects or plant diseases, visit HungryPests.com and the USDA [Citrus Diseases webpage](#).

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