

# A NOTE ON YELLOW—MITE OF TEA

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Yellow mite of tea (*Hemitarsonemus latus* (Banks) Ewing) is the commonest of the mite pests of Ceylon Tea plantations. A partial failure of the monsoonal rains or fairly long intermittent periods of sunny weather appear to favour a build up of extensive and severe attacks. In the Dimbulla area attacks are generally most severe during the inter-monsoonal months of January - May and September - October.

Unlike purple, scarlet and red spider mites, which feed mainly on mature tea leaves, the yellow mite confines its feeding to young succulent leaves. Fields in the first year of recovery from pruning are particularly attractive and in such cases, if weather conditions are favourable to the mites' development, attacks may become widespread and devastating. In older fields, though attacks may become widespread during favourable seasons, infestation is usually confined to patches of tea or individual bushes.

Yellow mite infested leaves become brown and roughened on their under surface or carry two browned parallel streaks on each side of the mid-rib. The upper surface of the leaf becomes slightly wrinkled in appearance while the leaf itself may curl inwards. Heavily attacked leaves lose their normal glossy appearance and become browned and brittle. Such leaves defoliate.

The mite itself is difficult to see with the unaided eye but with a hand lens all stages of development of the mite may be observed on both surfaces of the infested flush points. The infestation is normally confined to the opening bud and the couple of leaves below it. The browned, brittle leaves are devoid of living yellow-mites.

The female mite is capable of laying up to an average of two eggs a day. These eggs hatch in 2 - 3 days into small larvae which become adults in about 3 days. The complete cycle from egg to egg being approximately 5 days. The adult may live for about two weeks during which period up to 28 eggs may be laid. This short life cycle enables a very quick build up of populations under favourable weather conditions.

## Control Methods

*Agricultural control.* The most feasible method of control of yellow mite is in the removal of all mite susceptible leaf by severe plucking. Such leaf can be manufactured. Two to three rounds of fish leaf plucking, at fairly close intervals, are usually sufficient to control the mite attack. After such treatment, however, it is advisable to rest the bushes sufficiently long to form new shoots bearing a bud and 4 opened leaves before normal plucking commences again.

*Chemical control.* On tea recovering from pruning or in areas which are not in plucking—i.e. new clearings and resting tea—the application of a sulphur spray of which a number are available on the market is advised. The infested area should be sprayed with either 'Spersul' (I.C.I. Ltd.) 'Thiovit' (Baur & Co. Ltd.) or 'Shell Dispersible Sulphur' (Shell Co.) at a dilution of 1 lb. in 25 gallons water. Application rates of the suspension should be sufficiently high to wet both surfaces of the younger leaves. On tea recovering from pruning two applications, at weekly intervals may be necessary for effective control.

If the sulphur preparations are sprayed on to tea in plucking leaf *should on no account* be manufactured for at least 3 weeks after spraying. Sulphur causes objectionable tainting of the manufactured tea unless the stipulated time interval between spraying and harvesting is adhered to.