

Effective management strategies for Perth vegetable growers to control stable fly breeding

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Are you a vegetable grower in one of these Local Government Areas (LGAs)?

- Cities of Armadale, Cockburn, Kwinana, Rockingham, Swan, Kalamunda and Wanneroo.
- Shires of Capel, Chittering, Dandaragan, Gingin, Harvey, Serpentine–Jarrahdale and Victoria Plains
- the portion of the Shire of Murray described as the Peel-Harvey Coastal Plain Catchment - State Planning Policy No. 2.1.

If so, your community needs your help to reduce the number of stable flies that cause pain and distress to people and animals.

Stable fly is a declared pest under section 22(2) of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act) for these LGAs.

Under section 30 of the BAM Act, you as the landholder are responsible for controlling stable fly breeding on your property in these areas to reduce their numbers and impact on yourselves and your community.

What is stable fly and why is it a problem in Perth?

- Stable fly (*Stomoxys calcitrans*) is a blood sucking parasitic fly with an extremely painful bite.
- It is also known as the biting house fly, dog fly, power mower fly, and barn fly.
- Its only source of food is fresh blood painfully drawn from people, pets and grazing animals (cows, sheep and horses). To draw blood, this fly shreds the skin of its host with its razor-sharp proboscis.



- Stable flies thrive in Perth, where it breeds in soil containing decaying organic matter, such as waste and reject vegetable produce, aged animal manure, or lawn clippings.
- Female stable flies lay eggs in soil near the rotting material. The eggs develop into larvae, then pupae, before emerging as adults that fly up to 20 km in search of a blood feed.

How do I reduce stable fly breeding on my property?

Short harvesting periods save precious water, decrease chemical use, and reduce available breeding sites for stable fly.

Best practice:

Stop harvesting by day 6, then:

1. immediately turn off all irrigation to the harvested area, and
2. lift stumps and remaining vegetation in the soil (including vegetation in wheel ruts) to the surface, then
3. use a high-speed mulcher, flail mower or slasher to break down remaining waste material and leave to dry-out (desiccate) on the surface.

Prolonged selective harvesting

Continuing selective harvesting for more than 6 days while irrigation continues creates **extremely high-risk** conditions for stable fly breeding.

The wet, rotting waste left behind becomes a perfect breeding hotspot, and at temperatures around 32 °C, stable fly numbers can explode in as little as 2 weeks. Immediate action is critical to prevent outbreaks.

To manage areas with prolonged selective harvesting (for more than 6 days):

- Choose an appropriate pesticide [approved by the APVMA](#) for stable fly. Use throughout the duration of harvest, following the manufacturer's instructions to compensate for irrigation and/or rain.
- **Daily** - inspect for signs of eggs and larvae in and under rotting waste material such as stumps in the soil, or in wheel ruts.
- **If eggs, larvae or pupae are found** – more pesticide is needed to penetrate these areas to prevent stable fly development. Alternatively stop harvesting immediately and follow steps 1 to 3 above.

Reject produce

Within 6 days any produce that is not suitable for sale must be either:

- fed out to stock in thin lines **or**
- deep buried * to at least a depth of 1 metre **or**
- disposed at a waste management facility.

By managing vegetable waste and reject vegetable produce on your property you are reducing the number of breeding sites for stable flies and protecting yourselves and your community from this fly's painful bites.

More information



dpird.wa.gov.au/stablefly

* Note: Deep burial of large volumes of waste material may have environmental consequences. Persons considering this means of disposal should contact relevant government bodies for advice.

Where do stable flies breed?

Check the soil for stable fly larvae and pupae

- Three times per week – look for larvae in several sites where there is waste or reject vegetable produce (stalks, leaves and root stumps).



Larvae in celery stump, which has the potential to produce over 100,000 stable flies if multiplied over a whole field of waste.

- Stable fly eggs are white, sausage-shaped and very small (1 mm) and laid in groups of 10 to 20 eggs.
- Larvae are worm-shaped and pale-yellow to creamy-white in colour. To find them expose moist material to sunlight and watch for the larvae as they move away from the light.
- To find pupae, scrape drier parts of the soil with a trowel or knife, digging 5 to 10 cm deep and wide. The pupae are capsule-like and reddish-brown in the early stage and darken to almost black before the adult fly emerges.
- If stable fly larvae or pupae are present, treat the soil and waste vegetation with an appropriate and approved pesticide at the rate recommended by the manufacturer and leave undisturbed for 2 weeks.

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