



Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner

NURSERY INDUSTRY UPDATE

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FOR INFORMATION:

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Protecting Florida Palms

Effectively managing red palm mites in nursery environments

Red palm mite, *Raoiella indica* (RPM) is a pest of coconut, areca and date palms in the Middle East and is probably widespread in tropical and subtropical regions throughout the Eastern Hemisphere.

After years of surveillance by the Florida Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Program (a joint effort of the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture), and attempts to keep the red palm mite from reaching Florida, it was detected in December 2007 on a coconut palm in Palm Beach County. This was the first confirmed report of this serious plant pest in the US.

A concentrated survey around the first find was initiated, and to date, infestations have been found in Broward, Miami-Dade, Martin, Monroe and Palm Beach counties. Survey efforts are now concentrated on palm nurseries and their surrounding areas. Although the insect is spreading, populations of RPM to date have been lower than first anticipated.

Complete control in the nursery environment has proven to be impractical due to pressures of RPM-infested palms in the surrounding landscape, and the inability of miticides to provide 100% control. At this time, long-term control of this new pest will be in the form of suppression with chemical treatments and the use of biological control agents that will help keep RPM in check.

RPM will no longer be considered a mandatory quarantine due to the reasons stated, but will be regulated like other cosmopolitan pests, and quarantined when detected at high levels in the nursery environment. Following are the key elements (links will provide complete information) of the adjustments that have been made to state regulations related to RPM:

- When detected any time at a nursery or stock dealer, a compliance agreement will be required to be signed and followed.
- Quarantine action will be placed on a nursery when RPM is detected at high levels.
- The Texas RPM Compliance Agreement must still be followed for host plant shipment to Texas from positive counties.
- Contact your local plant inspection office ([link](#)) for more information.

While chemical control may be necessary to control high populations of red palm mites, outside the nursery environment it is hoped this pest will be kept in check by natural enemies and Florida's temperate climate.

Information on the control of RPM can be found on the University of Florida's Institute of Food & Agriculture Sciences website <http://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/lso/RPM/RPM.htm>

There is nothing that represents Florida better than a healthy palm swaying in the breeze, and the department is committed to protecting Florida's important palm industry. Current statistics of the palm industry include approximately 4,300 Florida nurseries with palms in their inventory; 26,712,326 palms in those nurseries; and \$200 million in annual sales, representing 7% of total Florida nursery sales.

Palms are restricted from entering Florida from countries with red palm mite infestations without phytosanitary certificates. To further prevent the introduction of additional pests and diseases of palms, palm handicrafts are prohibited from entry into Florida.

Additional information concerning RPM can be found at http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/enpp/ento/red_palm_mite.html or by calling the Division's toll-free number 888-397-1517.