

Media release

Home gardeners respond to COVID-19

The Goulburn Murray Valley (GMV) Fruit Fly office in Victoria has responded to a surge in enquires by the public wanting to grow their own fruit and vegetables in the safety of their own backyards due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

GMV Regional Fruit Fly Coordinator Ross Abberfield said COVID-19 restrictions are escalating daily and more and more people are opting to grow their own fruit and vegetables, with a reported run on vegetable seedling and seed sales in recent weeks and months.

“With the government enacting social distancing measures together with travel restrictions advice we are being contacted by people who want to avoid going into crowded places such as supermarkets and markets. Many have self-isolated and want advice on growing their own produce at home, so they can de-stress in the garden and eat their own fruit and vegetables,” Mr Abberfield said.

The community has been assured our food security is not under threat and that Australia produces more than enough fresh produce to abundantly feed our nation, with the GMV being the ‘Nation’s Orchard’. Our supermarkets and food suppliers will remain open and we’re being reminded there is no need for panic buying,” he said.

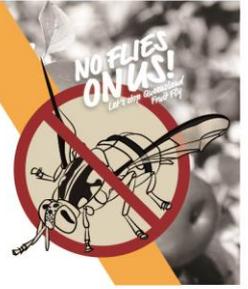
“For those that have extended their vegetable gardens or started a garden for the first time it is important that they are aware of the steps we all need to take to reduce the spread of fruit fly, which is critical in protecting Victoria’s horticulture industry,” Mr Abberfield said.

“We all know that fruit and vegetables are full of antioxidants that strengthen our immune system and the question I am being asked is, ‘how can I be sure that what I grow will not be ruined by fruit fly?’ he said.

The answer is simple, ‘Pick, Prune, Protect’. As part of the “No Flies On Us” – Let’s Stop Queensland Fruit Fly (QFF) strategy, the GMV Fruit Fly Project has supplied over 40,000 information packs (expanding on the three P’s message) to community, industry and government. Information packs are available from customer service centres in Greater Shepparton, Moira, Berrigan, Campaspe and Strathbogie Shires. Many other community and government organisations around Australia have also adopted the GMV Fruit Fly Area Wide Management model as a means of controlling fruit fly in their areas.

“Our aim is to instil ownership of issue by creating awareness, education and engagement in the community, industry and government so we reduce fruit fly populations and continue to produce high quality fruit and vegetables, both domestically and commercially,” Mr Abberfield said.

This has been achieved through the installation and monitoring of numerous regional QFF Trapping Grids, identifying and targeting hot spot locations, deploying field officers to assist landowners, providing the community and growers with monthly updates, forecasting and best practice advice, QFF awareness media campaigns, schools education and trap making programs, community and grower workshops and the free removal of unmanaged fruit habitat.



The GMV Regional Fruit Fly project has achieved more than a 60 per cent reduction of QFF numbers across the region and a 73 per cent reduction in the township of Cobram in Moira Shire. The project's success to date was confirmed after being independently assessed and awarded the Victorian Regional Achiever and Agricultural Innovation Awards in 2019.

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, we must unite to ensure that our quality food supply is maintained and protected from fruit fly infestation.

"If residents make the decision to grow more fruit and vegetables in their backyards, they need to know how to stop QFF infesting their produce. This means they have to instigate their own monitoring, prevention and control activities to ensure they can have clean, green produce at their fingertips," Mr Abberfield said.

The GMV Fruit Fly Project is funded by the Victorian Government's Managing Fruit Fly Regional Grants Program. For more information about fruit fly prevention in the GMV, email gmvfruitfly@moira.vic.gov.au or visit www.gmv-qldfruitfly.com.au

Caption: Goulburn Murray Valley Regional Fruit Fly Coordinator Ross Abberfield has reminded residents who have started a vegetable garden for the first time or expanded existing gardens to familiarise themselves with fruit fly monitoring, prevention and control activities to ensure our quality food supply is protected and maintained.

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