

Oilseed rape - Managing pests

Scottish oilseed rape faces a wide range of pests from establishment through to flowering and pod development. Successful OSR pest management is increasingly about growing a crop that can tolerate pest pressure, monitoring what's happening in the field and only intervening when the risk justifies it. Following on from Publication 1 ([The Role of Major Nutrients in Oilseed Rape](#)), and Publication 2 ([Oilseed Rape Rotations and Establishment](#)) this publication looks at 6 of the main pests in Scottish oilseed rape.

Top tip: Use an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach, combining crop monitoring, cultural controls and targeted action to manage oilseed rape pests while reducing reliance on pesticides.





Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle

- When? Adult beetle damage: crop establishment (Aug/Sep). Larval damage: late autumn and winter
- What to look for: small 'shot holes' in leaves. Adult feeding can stunt the crop, larvae then feed within plant petioles and stems
- Prioritise rapid crop establishment to outgrow early feeding damage. Spraying isn't always the answer and pyrethroid resistance is widespread

Assess damage, crop growth rate and consider action thresholds and other IPM tactics before treatment



Pollen Beetle

- When? Green-to-yellow bud stage (from mid-April)
- What to look for: greenish, black beetles chew into closed buds to feed on pollen, which can cause bud abortion and stalks with no flowers or pods
- Action thresholds depend on plant population density. If crops are small or stressed due to other pest damage, a lower threshold should be used

Once flowers open, beetles can feed on pollen without damaging the developing flower and can actually contribute to pollination



Slugs

- When? Establishment and early growth phases (Aug/Sep)
- What to look for: grazed underside to leaves, resulting in reduced crop vigour and ability to cope with further pest damage
- Aim for a fine, firm and well-consolidated seedbed and consider rolling after sowing. Put slug traps out, assess thresholds and monitor crops regularly

Burying trash can reduce slug numbers by removing their habitat and destroying eggs. If you have to use slug pellets, incorporate them into your IPM plan



Winter Stem Weevil

- When? Weevils migrate into OSR Sep & Oct and lay eggs 4 weeks later, larvae feed during winter
- What to look for: grey-brown weevils lay eggs, larvae then tunnel into the stem and down to the base for feeding throughout the winter
- Monitor crops for adult weevils from September. If thresholds have been exceeded there is a 3-4 week window to control weevils before they start laying eggs

Insecticide treatment may not be absolute due to resistance. Strong, well-established crops are better able to tolerate damage



Aphids

- When? Autumn risk (Sep/Nov) and Summer risk (Jun/Jul)
- Autumn: peach-potato aphid can transmit Turnip Yellows virus which can lead to reduced yields. Aphids can overwinter on rape
- Summer: aphid colonies may be seen on plant stems, leaves and pods, problems are more likely in dry summers

Monitor regional bulletins or use yellow water traps to check for aphid presence and refer to action thresholds before considering aphicide treatment



Cabbage Seed Weevil

- When? During flowering (typically May onwards)
- What to look for: small greyish-black weevils with a long snout. Adult weevils lay eggs inside pods, larvae then feed on developing seeds, reducing seed yield
- Numbers need to exceed 1 weevil every 2 plants throughout the crop during flowering to justify an insecticide treatment

Unnecessary pyrethroid sprays will increase the risk of pollen beetle resistance to this insecticide group



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