

**Mighty mite, reared in Canada, could be a big help in protecting greenhouse produce**

*'Voracious predator' doesn't need males to reproduce and has proved itself proficient in fighting infestations of insects like aphids*

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By Peter Kuitenbrouwer



*'The lions of the African plain on greenhouse vegetable leaves': The anystis, a type of mite being raised at Ontario's Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, is being used to kill other bugs that pose infestation threats. Handout Taro Saito*

Every day in vegetable greenhouses across Canada insects are fighting epic battles best viewed through a magnifying glass: Ladybugs eat aphids; mites eat thrips; parasitic wasps lay an egg inside an aphid that grows and eventually destroys its host.

"It's just like in the movie *Alien*," said Michael Brownbridge, research director of horticultural production systems at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre in the Niagara peninsula in Southwestern Ontario.

Vineland is working with a new predatory mite — a red bug that resembles a tiny spider. Taro Saito, senior research technician for biological control, found the bug, a

mite, while he was playing with his son in the garden around his apartment in nearby St. Catharines.

“It is a very active, very voracious predator,” Brownbridge said. “These are the lions of the African plain on greenhouse vegetable leaves. They eat a lot of pests.”

Vineland has maintained a colony of the mites for four years. They are all female and don’t need males to reproduce.

The challenge now is to breed sufficient numbers of the mites. Vineland is still fine-tuning the growing process, but one option is to feed them insect eggs that can be produced cheaply in large quantities.

Even so, researchers are confident that they can find demand for whatever mites they can rear. The mite, for example, has proven useful in fighting infestations of foxglove aphids on the leaves of greenhouse bell pepper plants.

“The aphid is one of the challenging pests for which we don’t have a biological control,” Brownbridge said. “This mite eliminated most of the aphids on the peppers.”

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