

“How I saved the peaches of Monate from the ravenous bugs”

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It is a limited production, and like all rare and delicious things, it sells like hot cakes. But in recent years, the **peaches of Monate**, the pride of Varese agriculture, are even more difficult to find because of an enemy that came from afar. And **Luca Franzetti**, the owner of the farm **Le Selve di Travedona**, one of the last remaining producers of this local specialty, knows something about it.

“For our business,” Franzetti said, “the brown, marmorated stink bug **has been a real scourge**, especially in past years. In 2016, it cost us more than sixty percent of the harvest, and in 2017, nearly half. You can imagine the damage it caused.”

However, some might say that the fruit is harvested in the summer, when there are few bugs. “With the arrival of autumn, especially on these lovely days in October, **they are many more visible to man**, ” the farmer continued, “ because they come into the houses, attracted by the warmth; but the truth is that they never left.”

The brown, marmorated stink bug does not sting or transmit diseases, but, although harmless to man (like other, invasive “alien” species, such as *Popillia japonica*, *Drosophila suzukii* and *Aetina tumida*), this insect, which comes from the East, **is giving many farmers, in many Italian regions, a hard time and it has even crossed into the Canton Ticino**. The brown, marmorated stink bug, with its typical red-brown “marbled” colouring, has **invaded fruit orchards**, with a particular preference for trees bearing **apples, pears, peaches, plums and cherries**.

And unfortunately, the damage caused is irreparable. “When the bug lands on fruit, it sucks out the nectar and **necrotises it**. The effect is that it stops growing and withers; it looks shrivelled,” Franzetti explained. **“During the maturation phase, this process is not noticeable externally, but is evident as soon as the fruit is opened and cleaned.”** Losing a harvest is one of the most feared dangers for a farmer, and not only from an economic point of view. It also means **seeing the result of one year’s work, sacrifice and care, go up in smoke**.

Franzetti’s business is relatively new. His farm was started **ten years ago, “following in the footsteps” of the peach and plum crops and fruit trees handed down by his grandfather, who in the 1950s, had planted them on the land, on the shore of Lake Monate**. It is the legacy of passion and tradition, which his grandson revived and made his profession. **Perhaps this emotional connection was one more reason to work hard to protect** this characteristic and renowned production **“from the invaders”**.

“In previous years, we paid the price of underestimating the problem,” he acknowledged. “In fact, the **first effects of the invasion were visible as early as 2015, but we weren’t prepared**. If you consider that each female lays up to four hundred eggs, you see immediately what result it has. But this year, after some experiments, we managed to stem the problem. We certainly haven’t solve it completely, because **15% of the production has been lost**, but in a way, we’ve controlled it. In our case, using some **pheromone traps** worked to attract the bugs away from the orchards during the harvest months (from July to the first half of August, *ed.*). We also tried other methods, but this one proved to be the most effective. **So, despite the difficulties, the peaches and the plums of Monate are safe, also for this year.**”

di Translated by Alessia Stocco (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)