



APHIDS

Host Plants and Description

Aphids attack a wide range of plants, including annuals, perennials, vegetables, trees, shrubs and roses. Aphids vary widely in color but are identifiable by their shape, which is pear-like, and by two visible bumps on their hind end. They may or may not have wings. Some, such as the woolly apple aphid, are covered with white cottony material and resemble a mealybug.

Plant Damage/Symptoms

Aphids congregate on the tips of stems and the underside of leaves to suck plant fluids. They cause leaves to curl and sometimes transmit diseases. Some species, such as those that attack honeysuckle, cause a distorted growth pattern known as witches' broom. As they feed, aphids produce a sweet, sticky substance called honeydew, which, in turn, grows a sooty mold that gives leaves a dirty appearance. Tree-feeding aphids can produce honeydew in such quantities that it falls down on objects below, such as parked cars or sidewalks. The honeydew also attracts bees, wasps and ants.

Controls

In many cases, damage from aphids is minimal, and no control is needed. Plant susceptible trees such as crabapples away from parking areas and paths where the honeydew will be bothersome. Do not over-fertilize as this increases aphid infestation.

Aphids have many natural enemies. Grow a wide variety of flowering plants to increase the number of these predators. Be patient, though—when temperatures are low, it may take up to several weeks for predators to appear.

In the meantime, control aphids by knocking them off with a forceful spray of water from the garden hose. Repeat if necessary every three to four days until the aphids' natural predators are able to take over. Remove small infestations by hand or selectively prune them out.

Insecticidal soaps are highly effective, and they have no residual effect that might hurt beneficial predators. Soaps are safe to handle and non-toxic to mammals and birds. Follow directions carefully and avoid spraying in direct sun. Some plants are sensitive to soap—test a few leaves before treating the whole plant.

Horticultural oils are an option for trees and shrubs. They are also contact killers that have low toxicity to mammals. Both summer and winter formulas are available--be sure to use the proper type for the season. Avoid spraying while honeybees are active.

Insecticides containing acephate are also effective but should be the last choice as they are more toxic.

Recommended Controls by Plant Category

- Vegetables--insecticidal soap
- Flowers—insecticidal soap, acephate: *Do not use insecticidal soap on ferns or impatiens.*
- Trees & Shrubs--insecticidal soap, horticultural oils, acephate