

What's bugging your garden and house plants?

...It could be Aphids or an Aphid-related Problem

What to look for

- tiny, 1/16 to 3/8 inch (2-3 mm long), soft-bodied, pear shaped, variously
- coloured insects, may have wings
- clustered on the underside of the leaves and on the stem
- curled and distorted leaves
- many ants on the plant
- sticky substance on leaves
- substance on cars parked under trees may be aphid honeydew, not tree sap

What Aphids do

- suck plant sap causing curled or distorted leaves and buds
- affected plants are wilted, stunted and new buds are malformed
- leaves turn yellow and become twisted and curled
- a shiny, sticky film on the leaves is honeydew secreted by the aphids
- black sooty mould grows on the honeydew
- honeydew also attracts ants
- most diseases are spread by aphids from plant to plant

Specific Plants affected by Aphids

Plants include: roses, maple especially sycamore maple, oak, poplar and aspen, berries, birch, spruce, willow, asparagus, beans, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, radish, mustards, kohlrabi, bok choy, pak choy, gai lan, turnip, rutabaga, lettuce, peas, peppers but any plant can be affected by aphids.

Preventing Aphid Infestation

- avoid over fertilizing plants with nitrogen as new growth attracts aphids
- aphids are best controlled as soon as they are noticed when colonies are small and before plant leaves start to curl
- attract natural predators - lady beetles, aphid midges, hover fly larvae, lacewings or other predators by planting pollen and nectar plants
- if growing lettuce use fine-screened cages or plant under row covers to assist in preventing aphid infestation

Controls

- wash aphids off plants with a strong stream of water, repeating as necessary
- wait for aphid predators, such as lady beetles, lacewings, aphid midges and hover flies to arrive and feast on the aphids. (Purchasing lady bugs is not recommended as they often fly away from the release site.)
- if problem is extensive, involves many plants and/or most leaves, you may wish to consider harsher methods - consult with a certified pesticide dispenser at a garden centre or store to discuss least toxic, safer control products
- using harsher methods may necessitate a season-long program as many of the natural predators will also be killed
- Note - the common home remedy of stripping aphids from plant stems by hand also kills beneficial, aphid predators. Using another method is recommended.

Secondary problem due to Aphids

Sooty mould

What is it?

- Sooty mould is a fungal problem
- doesn't usually harm plants but it does indicate a serious infestation of sucking insects like aphids or scale insects

What to look for

- leaves and other plant parts have a dark gray to sooty black layer over the surface which can be readily wiped off to show the healthy green leaf surface below
- the mould grows on the sugars in the sticky honeydew excreted by sucking insects such as aphids, mealybug, scale and whitefly. The mould does not enter the plant tissue.
- poor plant growth or may cause the collapse of the plant
- sooty moulds spread most quickly in moist, warm conditions

Preventing Sooty Mould

- preventive measures and control of aphids as noted on reverse side. These measures are effective for scale insects as well.

Controls

- rinse sticky leaves with water to remove honeydew before sooty moulds can grow
- control aphids, and scale insects to eliminate source of honeydew
- honeydew, sooty mould, aphids and scale insects can be washed from leaves and flowers with a stream of water from a hose
- maintain healthy plants

Plants affected by Sooty Mould: any plant where aphids or scale insects are found

For further information about aphids and aphid-related problems:

Call VanDusen Plant Information Line at 604-257-8662 or email.us.

References

Home & Garden Pest Management Guide for British Columbia - 2001 edition, British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

Integrated Pest Management Manual for Home and Garden Pests in British Columbia, 2001 edition, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks

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