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Aphids Amongst Us

It is almost inevitable to discover some aphids when looking at plants. They are found almost on every plant from the greenhouse to the landscape. Aphids are 1/16 to 1/8 inches in length and vary in color, depending upon the species and the plants on which they develop. Aphids also have a variety of body shapes from oval, pear, spindle to elongate, but always have two cornicles on the end of their abdomens. Some species even look woolly due to white or gray colored wax secretions over their bodies.

Aphids develop through gradual metamorphosis, having an egg, nymph, and adult stage. During hot and dry weather, some aphid species can complete their lifecycle from egg to adult in as little as 7 to 8 days. This allows aphid populations to grow at an astounding rate.

Aphids feed on plant phloem of twigs, branches, fruits, flowers, and roots. As a result of their feeding, the plant may be stunted in growth and may have deformed leaves and/or fruit. Aphids also secrete honeydew as they feed. This honeydew is a perfect substrate for growth of black sooty mold. Sooty mold may completely cover leaves, reducing their capacity to photosynthesize. Honeydew is also a food source for ants. Some ant species protect aphids from their natural enemies and may carry aphids to uninfested plants, allowing aphid populations to expand into new areas.

To detect if aphids are present, close inspection of the undersides of leaves, around stems, buds and flowers to detect their presence. Also check for the presence of cast skins, honeydew, sooty mold, and stunted growth since these are indicators of aphid presence. Sticky traps may be used in areas to monitor population levels. Always inspect new planting material or before moving plants into another area as to avoid an aphid infestation.

Some Control Options:

Cultural Control:

Keeping weeds at a minimum level will help to decrease the aphid population, since aphid populations will build up on weeds and then move onto landscape plants. Also avoid use slow release nitrogen fertilizer, as to avoid rapid new growth that aphids

prefer to feed upon. If honeydew ants are associated with aphid infestations, baits or other ant control products may be used to control the ant population.

Biological Control:

Some natural enemies of aphids include lady beetles, syrphid flies, lacewings, and parasitic wasps. These natural enemies should be conserved and augmented in and around greenhouse and landscapes.

Chemical Control:

Some chemicals that can be used for control are insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, and neem oil. These products will only kill aphids currently living on the plant, so these treatments must be repeated at regular intervals in order to gain control of the aphid population. Other products for aphid control include systemic insecticides such as those containing imidacloprid. Try to avoid using insecticides with the same mode of action, in order to reduce the risk of insecticide resistance.



Picture by Dr. Micheal Merchant, Extension Urban Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

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