

Bad Bug: Aphids

Description

Tiny pear-shaped, soft-bodied insects up to 1/8" long, aphids may be green, yellow, brown, red, gray or black. Some species have winged forms. Aphids have piercing, sucking mouth parts that penetrate plant tissue and remove sap.

Life Cycle

Eggs overwinter on woody stems, hatching in spring into stem females, which can give birth continuously to live nymphs without having to mate. Nymphs mature in 1-2 weeks. In fall, males and normal females are born; these mate to produce overwintering eggs.

Plants They Attack

Many potential host plants because there are so many different species of aphids. Some plants are more susceptible than others, including: Nasturtiums, roses, milkweed, Chrysanthemums, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, geraniums, fruit trees and members of the cabbage family.

Spot the Damage

Aphids feed in groups on new plant growth or on undersides of leaves, causing stem tips, new leaves, and buds to be curled, distorted and/or discolored. Established plants can tolerate moderate damage, but young foliage can be severely stunted. Aphids excrete a substance called "honeydew" which appears glossy and sticky on the leaves. Occasionally, ants will be present as they farm the aphids and feed on the "honeydew."

Preventative Actions

Dislodge the insects by spraying affected plant parts with a sharp stream of water, or try using a vacuum cleaner to suck them up.

Block access to susceptible plants by placing a lightweight spun fabric row cover tunnel (aka: remay cloth) over them before the insects arrive. Seal the edges of the tunnel with soil. Remove fabric in time for pollination.

Attract native predators and parasites by planting pollen and nectar plants such as yarrow or herbs which will flower like thyme, cilantro, dill, lavender, hyssop, chamomile etc. Lady beetles and syrphid fly larvae eat aphids.

Hand squash insects, or pick them off and place them in a container of soapy water.

Avoid over-feeding plants. Excessive nitrogen causes tender growth, especially attractive to aphids.

Organic Product Controls

Use homemade garlic, quassia, or tomato-leaf sprays. Horticultural oil, insecticidal soap, neem or pyrethrin (caution: pyrethrins are a broad-spectrum insecticide and will kill all insects).

Sources quoted:

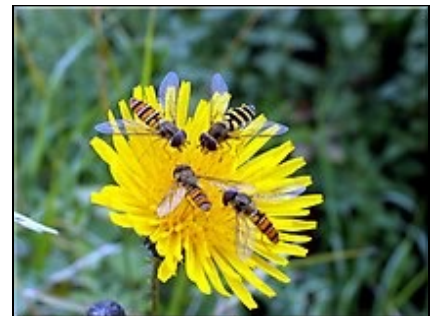
- 'Good Bug Bad Bug' Walliser, 2008
- 'The Organic Gardener's Handbook,' Ellis and Bradley, 1996
- Cedar Circle Farm: <https://cedarcirclefarm.org/tips/category/pests>



Adult pea aphid with larvae
photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, bugwood.org



Predator: Syrphid fly larva eating aphids (aka Aphid Lion)
photo: Clemson University bugwood.org



Predator: Syrphid Fly (Hover or Flower fly)
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Predator: Lady Beetle eating aphid larvae