BUG BUSTERS!

NO HOUSEPLANT PEST WILL EVER BE SAFE AGAIN.

Houseplant pests are tiny, sneaky, and very naughty buggers that will attack your plant, causing visible damage, stunting and distorting growth and, in severe outbreaks, could even be terminal for your baby. While pests are an inevitable reality of plant parenthood, luckily, there are far fewer to deal with and extreme outbreaks are far less likely indoors *(one of the many reasons we LUV indoor jungling!)*

The best way to keep those pesky buggers at bay is to provide optimal care conditions for your plant babies - keeping them healthy, strong, and more resilient. You'll also want to stay vigilant when doing your regular 'pest inspection' check-ins - when you're watering - inspecting the leaves, stems and soil in dirty detail for any signs of pests. Some plants are more susceptible to pests than others, so depending on the type and number of plants in your collection, you'll want to consider regular preventative treatment rituals *(we LUV neem oil & insecticidal soap!)*.

If you spot any plants that are sick with a pest, take action immediately, as these buggers can spread quickly. Isolate your sick plant in a designated rehab area while it's recovering to prevent your healthy babies from getting sick too. In order to determine the most optimal treatment plan, you'll first need to determine which pest(s) are attacking your baby. There are lots of pest treatments out there, so make sure you choose the right product that is recommended to control the specific pest you've identified. You'll also want to make sure that there is no warning against using the spray on the specific plant that needs to be treated. Be extra delicate with fuzzy-leaved and flowering plants, as most sprays will cause more harm than good *(At Leafy Luv, we don't use any sprays on our fuzzy-leaved and flowering friends.)*

When using treatment sprays, make sure to follow the instructions carefully. Be extra careful with sun exposure and avoid treatments in extreme weather conditions *(fogg freeze, heat, humidity, rain)* or on drought-stressed plants. Since the sprays only work if they make physical contact with the pest, being thorough is essential to success. Treatments can be very time-intensive, especially if it's a plant that's extra leafy so having a methodical process is important ensuring all leaves, stems and the top layer of the soil has been covered thoroughly with the spray. An epic playlist or podcast to channel that big plant parent energy is also highly encouraged.

If you're battling a quick-moving pest, like aphids, thrips or whitefly, you'll want to treat any neighboring plants that could have come in contact. If you're battling slow-moving buggers like scale or mealy bugs, only the infested plant needs to be treated, unless its leaves were physically touching another plant.

Pests are most likely to strike during the growing season (spring and summer) as they are wildly attracted to new growth. Certain pests, like fungus gnats, are attracted to overly moist conditions, whereas other pests like web-spinning spider mites are attracted to overly dry conditions - so in addition to treating the outbreak itself, you'll also want to put your Pest Foot Forward by tweaking your care approach to reduce the likelihood of another infestation. That way, the Pest is HISTORY!

APHID (GREENFLY)

Bug bio: Pear-shaped, soft-bodied, sucking insects with long slender mouthparts. Aphids can come in a myriad of colors but the most common is green. They often feed in clusters and they don't tend to move rapidly when disturbed.

Favorite hideouts: Shoot tips, flower buds and stems

Favorite snacks: Flowering plants and any plants producing lots of lush new growth

Most likely to attack: Late spring when temps are warm but not hot (65°-80°F)

Stress signals: While moderate numbers aren't usually damaging, large infestations can stunt shoots and turn leaves yellow. As they suck out the plant juices, aphids will leave large quantities of sticky honeydew deposits on the leaves, which often turns black with the growth of sooty mold fungus. Because ants LUV to eat this sticky honeydew, ants climbing up and around your plant in large numbers is likely a clue that aphids are lurking nearby. Some aphid species can even inject a toxin into plants, causing curled leaves and distorted growth.

Bug it out: Prune off any infested plant parts. Spray plant thoroughly with a plant-safe insecticidal soap or oil and repeat as necessary. To minimize future outbreaks, avoid over-fertilizing.

MITES

CYCLAMEN MITES

Bug bio: These microscopic buggers are too tiny for the naked eye to perceive. In a large infestation, they appear as a film of dust on the underside of leaves.

Favorite hideouts: Undersides of leaves

Favorite snacks: Begonias & Saint Paulia 'African Violets'

Most likely to attack: Super humid conditions (80 - 90%)

Stress Signals: Stunted growth, curled leaf edges, twisted stems, withered flower buds

Bug it out: Unfortunately, spraying with standard insecticides is not effective against these malicious mites. We recommend disposing of any infested plants. To minimize future outbreaks, increase air circulation to reduce humidity levels.

WEB-SPINNING SPIDER MITES

Bug bio: Tiny dots that tend to cluster in colonies and move when disturbed. Web-spinning mites are usually red but can also be black, orange or cream colored.

Favorite hideouts: Undersides of leaves

Favorite snacks: Plants that are drought-stressed. Alocasias, Aralias, Bird of Paradise, Calatheas, Ficus, and Palms are most desirable.

Most likely to attack: Overly hot, dry, dusty conditions

Stress Signals: Upper sides of leaves speckled / stippled with light dots / yellow blotches as the mites suck the sap out. Leaves turn yellowish or reddish and fall prematurely. In severe infestations, fine, white, silk webbing is wound tightly between the leaves and stems, with mite eggs often visible inside the webbing.

Bug it out: Prune off any infested plant parts. Spray plant thoroughly with a plant-safe insecticidal soap or oil and repeat as necessary. To minimize future outbreaks, increase humidity levels, decrease temperatures, and keep leaves clean and dust-free.

MEALYBUG

Bug bio: White-colored, soft-bodied, oval-shaped insects that are covered in a protective wax often described as 'white cottony fluff'

Favorite hideouts: Deep in plant nooks, crannies, and crevices - such as the crown of the plant, branch crotches, or on stems near the soil. In severe infestations, mealies can be found in large clusters on stems, stem axils and leaves. A few species lurk beneath the soil attacking the roots *('root mealies')*

Favorite snacks: Aglaonema, Bird of Paradise, Cactus, Dracaena, Hoya

Most likely to attack: Warm, mild weather found in greenhouses or indoors

Stress signals: Weak and stunted growth. Leaves wilt, yellow and fall prematurely. Mealies will produce the same telltale sticky honeydew deposits that aphids leave behind - which attracts ants and tends to lead to black sooty mold fungus.

Bug it out: Mealybugs are extremely difficult to control indoors without the help of natural enemies found outdoors. The best way to control a mild infestation is to physically remove the insects by handpicking or pruning them out. At Leafy Luv, we use q-tips dipped in rubbing alcohol to kill and remove all visible insects. Once all visible buggers have been eliminated, we then spray the plant thoroughly with a plant-safe insecticidal soap or oil to suppress any younger mealies that have less wax to protect them against the sprays. In more extensive outbreaks, you can also consider applying a 10 to 25% solution of isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol with a spray bottle. Mealies are nearly impossible to eradicate, so you'll need to monitor closely and repeat treatments weekly as needed. When infestations become severe, we recommend disposing of the plant altogether. To minimize future outbreaks, inspect all plants in dirty detail for mealies before bringing them into your home, and make sure to sanitize pots, stakes and garden tools before and after use. Avoid overwatering or applying nitrogen fertilizer, which can increase mealy bug populations.

SCALE

Bug bio: Immobile plant-sucking insects that are flat, circular or oval-shaped and have either a hard or soft outer shell that ranges drastically in color and appearance depending on the species. Armored scales have a hard, flattened, waterproof cover, whereas 'soft' scales have a smooth, cottony, or waxy surface.

Favorite hideouts: Stems and undersides of leaves, especially along the veins.

Favorite snacks: Cactus, Yucca

Most likely to attack: Warm weather of spring and summer months

Stress signals: Some scale species are often abundant, can weaken a plant and cause it to grow slowly whereas other species do no apparent damage, even when found in large numbers. Plants infested with scale appear water stressed, with leaves turning yellow and dropping prematurely. Parts of the plant that are heavily infested may die off altogether. Like the sneakier mealies and scales that doesn't leave an obvious trail, soft scale will produce the same telltale sticky honeydew deposits that aphids and mealybugs leave behind - which attracts ants and tends to lead to black sooty mold fungus.

Bug it out: To figure out the best treatment plant, you'll first want to determine whether the scale is armored or soft. You'll also ideally want to isolate the particular species of scale - as certain species can be harmful to certain plants and harmless to others. Once you've done the dirty work to identify the type and species of scale, you'll want to find a plant-safe insecticidal soap or oil that is effective in controlling that specific species. Spray the plant thoroughly, being careful to cover shoot terminals, undersides of leaves, and stems. Armored scales are less susceptible to sprays than their soft scale relatives, so being extra meticulous is key to success. Repeat treatment regularly as needed.

FUNGUS GNATS

Bug bio: Adult gnats are dark, delicate flies that look similar to mosquitoes and are almost as annoying - although, luckily, they don't bite! The larvae have shiny black heads and an elongated, whitish-to-clear, legless body.

Favorite hideouts: Adults gnats are often seen hovering near potted houseplants and running across (or resting on) soil and foliage. The larvae tend to lurk beneath in the soil undetected, feeding on fungi and organic matter.

Favorite snacks: Fungi and organic matter is their preferred snack, but the larvae can also go after the plant roots - especially in large numbers when there isn't enough organic matter to go around. Seedlings and young plants are especially susceptible.

Most likely to attack: Most conditions where there is an abundance of decaying vegetation and fungi commonly found in organically-rich soil.

Stress signals: Adult gnats buzzing around your plants are the most obvious sign of a pesky problem. While adult gnats don't do any damage to plants, large quantities of larvae can cause significant damage to the roots, stunting plant growth and eventually taking the plant down if left untreated. With a large infestation is especially moist conditions, the larvae tend to leave behind slime trails on the surface of the soil.

Bug it out: At Leafy Luv, we use a 2-pronged approach to keeping these pesky buggers at bay. To control the larvae, we sprinkle Bonide Systemic Granules in the top layer of the soil, which provides protection for up to 8 weeks once it gets dispersed throughout the soil via a watering. We repeat the Bonide every 2 months or sooner as needed *(in the case of a repotting or a more severe infestation)*. To control the adults, we use Katchy traps to attract and suck up them up. To minimize future outbreaks, avoid keeping your plants too moist, always allowing at least the surface of the soil to dry out between drinks, and often much more - depending on the plant's watering needs. Make sure all of your plants are potted in a pesticultured potting mix that allows for good drainage.

THRIPS

Bug bio: Tiny, slender insects with hairs on their wings that fly or jump from leaf to leaf. Thrips can range in color from translucent white, yellowish, dark brown, black or reddish-orange, depending on the species and life stage. *Wild fact:* some thrip species are actually beneficial predators of some mites species!

Favorite hideouts: Shoot tips and flower buds

Favorite snacks: Fruiting and flowering plants

Most likely to attack: Spring and summer months

Stress signals: Distorted, curled or dead shoot tips and leaves. Scabby, silvery to dark brown discoloration on fruit, leaves or petals. Dark specks of excrement on fruit or leaves.

Bug it out: Make sure thrips are actually present before taking action - as inadequate plant care, harsh weather and pathogens can cause similar looking damage. If thrips are indeed the culprit, prune off any infested plant parts. Spray plant thoroughly with a plant-safe insecticidal soap or oil *(we recommend Spinosad)* and repeat as necessary. To minimize future outbreaks, avoid overwatering or applying nitrogen fertilizer, which can increase thrip populations.

WHITEFLY

Bug bio: Tiny, moth-like, sap-sucking insects that fly around the plant when disturbed. Adults are white with wings and the baby nymphs are oval, legless and immobile (but, ironically, cause most of the damage).

Favorite hideouts: Undersides of the leaves

Favorite snacks: Whiteflies luv the warm, humid conditions found in greenhouses with begonias, poinsettias, hibiscus,and ivy being some of their all thyme favorite snacks. Luckily, it's extremely rare that you'll encounter whiteflies in your own indoor jungle *(thanks crossvent)*

Most likely to attack: Warm temperatures during summer months

Stress signals: Leaves turn yellow or silver, with baby whitefly nymphs visible on the undersides. Sadly infested leaves will prematurely drop. Whitefly will produce the same telltale sticky honeydew deposits that aphids, mealybugs and soft scale leave behind - which attracts ants and tends to lead to black sooty mold fungus. Certain species of whitefly will leave a white wax deposit on leaves.

Bug it out: Prune off any infested plant parts. Spray plant thoroughly with a plant-safe insecticidal soap or oil and repeat as necessary. To minimize future outbreaks, reduce temperatures, lower humidity levels, and keep leaves clean and dust-free.

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