BioBloomed

INFORMATION SHEET

Aphids

DESCRIPTION

Aphids are small, soft-bodied, pear-shaped insects with long antennae and a pair of cornicles (short tubes) sticking out on either side of their stomachs. Aphids damage plants by sucking the sap from leaves, twigs, stems, or roots. They can sometimes spread plant diseases in the process.

Many aphid species produce large amounts of "honeydew," a sweet sap that makes leaves shiny and sticky, accumulating on anything found under infected plants. Because of its sweetness, aphid honeydew attracts other pests like ants, flies, and wasps. The honeydew can also predispose an affected plant to develop black sooty mold, making the leaves appear dirty and grey.

All of these factors contribute to making the aphid a pest. An initial infestation of aphids is usually localized, but can spread quickly if allowed to develop unchecked. A colony of aphids can grow very quickly, especially indoors. To keep plant damage to a minimum, it is important to control an aphid infestation in the early stages.

LIFE CYCLE & PREFERENCES

A typical aphid life cycle starts with flightless females giving living birth to female nymphs without the involvement of males. Maturing rapidly, females breed profusely so that the number of these insects multiplies quickly. Winged females may develop later in the season, allowing the insects to colonise new plants.

SCOUTING

These pest bugs can usually be spotted on stems and the underside of leaves. Other indications of a possible aphid infestation is the presence of black mold and honeydew on leaves. Also the presence of ants can be a sign of aphids as the ants are attracted to the sweet sticky honeydew secretions of the aphid.

TREATMENT

Spraying for aphids is often ineffective as they tend to live on the underside of leaves escaping insecticide spray. However, beneficials can hunt this pest where ever they hide.

Adalia bipunctata is a two-spotted ladybird that will kill up to 100 aphids per day.

Aphelinus abdominalis, Aphidius colemani, and *Aphidius ervi* are all parasitic wasps that lay their eggs inside live aphids. When the eggs hatch the wasp larvae eats the predators from the inside out.

Chrysopa carnea (aka lacewing) larvae hatch from their egg starved and take no time devouring their favorite aphid food. Lacewings will also eat other pest bugs.

Aphidolets aphidimyza is also known as the aphid midge. The female midge lays up to 250 eggs in her short life time and each of these hatchlings will eat up to 50 aphids per day.