

Spider Mites

Background

Spider mites are common pests on many plants in the home and garden. They are a type of arachnid and may produce webbing, particularly in high populations. They range in colour from red and brown to yellow or green. Generally, they are too small to notice, so their colours aren't significant.

The eggs are round and quite large in proportion to the mother. Eggs can survive the winter as can adults, hidden in protected areas such as bark cracks. They can mature in a week after hatching.

Once mature, females can produce a dozen eggs daily for several weeks. This fast maturity and high egg production can lead to a rapid population explosion.

Damage

The signs that your plants may have a spider-mite problem are webbing on the foliage (not always present) and tiny yellow or white specks on the leaf caused by their feeding on the contents of individual plant cells. Also yellowing of the leaf, followed by premature drop-off, can occur. Heavily infested plants may become discoloured, stunted or killed.

Control

Early detection of mites is important. This can be done by hitting leaves over a piece of paper. They will appear as dust walking slowly on the paper.

Methods

Hosing down infested plants regularly will damage the mites' bodies and cause them to

stop feeding. Quarantine and inspect all new plants for any pest activity when purchasing them. Keep new houseplants away from other plants until you are sure no pests are present.

Spider mites have many natural predators capable of controlling them. These include many types of predatory mites, minute pirate bugs, big-eyed bugs, lady beetles and predatory thrips.

Pesticides

Most spider mites can be controlled with insecticidal soap and oils. A higher rate of either horticultural oil or dormant oil, three to four percent, is used during the spring and fall to control dormant eggs and adults. Thorough coverage of an infested plant with insecticidal soaps is effective on the active adults.

Neem oil is relatively new in Canada and nearly a miracle for the home gardener with a pest problem. It could be considered a one-shot solution. It affects the insects' metabolism as well as their molting, effectively killing them. The coating on the leaves will also prevent further outbreaks. The product is even safe on food crops.

"End All" is a chemical miticide and will stop all stages of most mites on contact.

Regular Inspection

If spider mites are detected early through regular inspection, their populations can be kept under control with a hose or soaps.

Michael Smith, Class of 2006

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery

Niagara-on-the-Lake Campus, 135 Taylor Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON L0S 1J0
phone: (905) 641-2252, ext. 4082; fax: (905) 988-4307 e-mail: mnewell@niagaracollege.ca
Website: <http://greenhousenursery.niagaracollege.ca>