



APHIDS

by Carol Ann Harlos

This year I have heard more complaints about aphids than any other gardening problem! Even the uninitiated recognize these small soft insects who multiply like rabbits (or is it the other way around?). This is because aphids can reproduce asexually. (Rabbits can't!) Spring and summer aphids are all females and so are their offspring! No males necessary!

Aphids are less than a quarter-inch long and come in many colors including green, yellow, brown, black, gray, or pink. Their bodies are pear-shaped. They have long antennae. Most aphids have short tubes (comicles) at the rear. Usually the adults have no wings but when aphids are successful their populations become crowded. At that time they develop wings to spread out to new sources of food, your

plants. Usually aphids are generalists, which means they feed on a wide variety of plants but there are specialists that consume potatoes, cabbage, apple and so forth.

Aphids tend to feed on soft tissue that is new growth and can attack any part of a plant including roots. Your plants may have aphids if the leaves are curling, if the plants are sticky, if there is a dark mold growing on top of the sticky substance, and/or if fruit or flowers are distorted. Look underneath leaves to be sure.

The sticky substance associated with aphids is called "honeydew." It is rich in sugar and the pressure of it entering the digestive tract at the mouth frequently causes it to be secreted from the anus. This often supports a mold termed "sooty mold" which gardeners frequently see on their plants.



Green Peach Aphid (above) photo and Black Cherry Aphid (*Myzus cerasi*) (Fabricius, 1775) credit: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org



What to do? Take the time to *really* look over your plants. That way you can catch the problem before it gets out of hand. I simply spray my plants with water on top and underneath. This knocks the aphids to the ground and damages their soft bodies. Ha! Other methods include insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, and/or garlic sprays. Lacewings, parasitic wasps, and ladybugs are also effective, but will leave if they emerge to find no aphids to consume!

As a beekeeper, I prefer the water spray method because it is mechanical and leaves no harmful residues. 🍷



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