

Winter Gardening

During the months of January, February and March in Hampton Roads, there are many days when the avid gardener can only sit inside, look at catalogs and hope for spring. There are a few days when it is possible to be outdoors doing necessary chores such as pruning and cleaning the garden. On these days, the observant gardener will check plants for those insect pests that live throughout the year.

Two of the most prevalent of these pests are aphids and scale. Both are chewing and sucking insects that feed on the tender parts of the plant, such as leaves and new growth. When feeding, they excrete a sweet, sticky liquid called honeydew that wets the leaves and anything beneath the infected plant. Honeydew is hard to remove, and is often followed by a black mold, called sooty mold. Sooty mold grows on the leaves, stems, and branches and will often cover the top of the leaf. Honeydew also attracts other insects such as ants, bees, wasps and flies. Often a covering of honeydew and sooty mold may be sufficient to affect the appearance of the plant. The best control for honeydew and sooty mold is to control the insect pest causing the problem.

Aphids

There are many species of aphids, also called plant lice. Aphids are small soft-bodied, and pear shaped or somewhat globular. They are variously colored and sometimes woolly. Host plants for aphids are most deciduous trees, shrubs, conifers, small fruit trees, vegetables, annuals and perennials. Eggs over winter on stems, and hatch in the spring into females. These females can give birth continuously to live young (nymphs) without ever having to mate. In the fall males and normal females are born and mate to produce over wintering eggs.



Scale



There are also many species of scale. They vary considerably in form and appearance. Some look like pinhead dots of gray or brown, others resemble tiny oyster shells, still others are disguised in waxy or cottony coverings. Scale spend most of their lives affixed to the leaves, stems or branches of their hosts. Scale insects have

shells that insecticides do not penetrate. Only the newly hatched crawlers are susceptible to insecticides. Host plants for scale are Japanese and Chinese hollies, euonymus, boxwood, pyracantha, spirea, barberry, camellia, flower quince to name a few of the more common plants of the Hampton Roads area. Scale and their eggs over winter on the plants, and they may eventually kill a plant if not controlled.

Control of both aphids and scale is a yearlong process. Spraying with a dormant oil spray during the dormant period is effective because it is easy to wet the twigs and branches for deciduous trees and shrubs. When spraying with a dormant oil spray, be sure to thoroughly cover stems and leaves of the plants and spray when temperature is not likely to go below freezing before the spray dries. As when using all pesticides, you must make sure to read and follow the label directions.

Other insecticides may be applied later in the season for aphids, however in treating for scale, insecticides are only effective when applied in the insect's crawling stage.

For more detailed information on when insecticides are applicable or other gardening questions, contact the Chesapeake Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension or the Chesapeake Master Gardeners at 382-6348 or e-mail us at gardener@agri.chesapeake.city.va.us.