

## What's Bugging Your Garden by Beth Turlington

Right now what's bugging my gardens and whole lot of other people's, are aphids and spider mites. You'd think with this non-stop heat and drought, the insects would be dying right along with our plants. But nooooo. They are thriving, multiplying, and just thoroughly enjoying themselves. Hot, dry weather is the perfect combination for infestations from these two.

There are more than 1,300 species of aphids in North America. That's 1,299 more that I care to think about. You will know when you have an infestation, because it looks like a Shriner's Convention of aphids on your plants. Fortunately, aphids have numerous natural enemies, like lady bugs, lace wings, syrphid flies and parasitic wasps all of whom find aphids a wonderful snack and can help keep the population in check. If however you feel they are starting to take over, hosing your plants off with a strong jet of water works wonders. Keep your eyes out and spray them down every 5 days. According to the late Al Norris, Master Gardener extraordinaire, you can add a drop or two of Dawn dishwashing liquid in a hose end sprayer to knock them out as well.

There are insecticidal soaps that are commercially available, just be sure if you chose to use one of these, read and follow the label directions exactly. There are also insecticides that say they will take aphids out, but most do don't really do the trick. Talk with an employee at one of our local nurseries if you want to use chemicals. Whichever way you choose to eliminate them, a personal suggestion, if you have yellow jackets snacking on the aphids, stand a ways back when you spray, they WILL sting you.

Aphids will overwinter on perennial plants, so keep your garden area cleaned up year round. Dormant oil sprays can help to control aphids, but never use an oil if the temperature outside will be over 90 degrees and they are best used in fall and winter.

Spider mites have their share of natural enemies too. Minute pirate bugs, predatory thrips and predatory mites are just a few that enjoy munching on them.

Detecting spider mites can be a bit tricky. There will most likely be some small webbing on your plants. You can also take a sheet of white paper, hold it under the leaves and tap the plant. The mites will show up as small dots that crawl.

Like aphids, a good blast of water or soapy water will knock them out, just be sure to get under the leaves as well. There are insecticides you can use, the drawback being they will kill the beneficial insects as well, allowing the spider mites to overpopulate.

The right water and fertilizing schedule will keep your plants healthy, allowing them to better fight off infestations. Keeping your beds mulched and using drip irrigation are two more components in your tool box to help combat insects. Water and nutrient stress plants are far more likely to be attacked because of their weakened state.

To see color photos of aphids and spider mite webs, please go to our website, [overthegardengate.org](http://overthegardengate.org) and on the top menu, click on What's Bugging Your Garden.

It's going to be a long hot summer around here, so keep your eyes open and your power nozzle ready.