

Spider Mites

It's hot. It's dry. It's time to look for spider mites! You'll need to head into the garden for this task as these pests are small and often found on the underside of leaves. Feeding can cause leaves to discolor, causing a speckled appearance. With severe infestations, leaves discolor to a silver or bronze color which may result in the leaves dropping from the plant. While mites feed on the underside of leaves, damage is more apparent on the tops.

Spider mites are arachnids, closely related to spiders and ticks, and are able to produce silk. They often cover leaves with webbing, especially in large populations. Webbing helps protect the mites and their eggs from natural enemies and harsh environmental conditions, and may sometimes protect them from pesticides.



Spider mites lay their eggs along the leaf vein during the growing season. Eggs are round and large in size when compared to adult mites. Some species of spider mites peak during warmer months of the year while others become more active in the cooler months of the year. The mites are able to develop more quickly when temperatures are warmer, with some spider mites going from egg to adult in less than 1 week. Spider mites thrive in dry conditions while their natural enemies require more humid conditions. Dry conditions allow spider mite populations to grow with little predation or parasitism that would help to keep the population at an acceptable level.

There are many predatory arthropods that feed on spider mites. Some of these include predatory mites, spider mite destroyers (a type of ladybug), minute pirate bugs, big-eyed bugs, and predatory

thrips. Proper watering of plants may help to reduce spider mite outbreaks as it can reduce stress brought on by drought. Using strong jets of water to hose plants can also help to dislodge spider mites. Miticides or acaricides can be used to manage spider mite outbreaks. Look for active ingredients such as horticultural oils (watch temperature when you use oils), insecticidal soaps, abamectin, bifenthrin, dimethoate or acephate.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

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