TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Whiteflies on indoor plants

Whiteflies are small, soft-bodied insects with piercing-sucking mouthparts. They are creamy white and adults have a mealy wax coating their body and wings. Immatures, also called nymphs, are small, oval, flattened and wingless.

Whitefly populations can become a problem on indoor plants due to the temperature being regulated inside structures. They like to be on the underside of leaves, often in clusters. Common species of whiteflies have a wide host range and are able to switch host plants.

Whiteflies use their straw-like mouthparts to pierce plant tissue and suck out juices. Large populations can cause foliage to turn yellow, appear to be dry or even fall off the plant. Some whiteflies cause plant distortion or foliage to turn silver in color. Others are capable of transmitting plant viruses.

Whiteflies exude honeydew, a sticky substance secreted by some plant-feeding insects. Honey dew causes foliage to become shiny in appearance and can attract a fungus called sooty mold. Some insects, such as ants, like to tend insects that create honeydew and protect honeydew producers from predators and parasites.

To reduce the chance of whitefly infestations, inspect all plants thoroughly for insects before bringing them indoors. If a plant is found with whiteflies, then isolate it while you take care of the problem. While plants remain indoors, they should be inspected for problems weekly. Yellow sticky cards (you can either buy these or make your own with yellow cardstock and adhesive) can be used to capture whiteflies as well as help you easily locate problem areas.

Depending upon the plant that is infested with whiteflies, you may be able to vacuum the insects from the leaves. Choose a vacuum that has low-power suction to pull the insects into the vacuum but not the plant.

Make wise pesticide choices and choose pesticides to target specific pests and/ or specific areas. For chemical treatment you can use insecticidal soap, azadirachtin, d-limonene, horticultural oils, botanicals, or a synthetic product. Target your treatment to the underside of the leaves to get to where the whiteflies like to hide. Multiple treatments will most likely be necessary due to eggs and pupae not being susceptible to pesticide treatments.

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