Aphids

Almost every plant has one or more aphid species that occasionally feed on it, but low to moderate numbers of aphids usually aren’t damaging to gardens or landscape trees.

Although aphids can curl leaves and produce sticky honey-dew, they rarely kill plants, and can usually be washed off with water. When aphid numbers are high, natural enemies often feed on them, eliminating the need for pesticides. When pesticides are necessary, use less-toxic products such as insecticidal soaps and oils.

Aphids are common in gardens.

- Aphids like lush, new growth. Don’t over fertilize; use organic or slow-release products.
- Aphids build up on flowering plums, roses, tulip trees, crape myrtles, apples, and many vegetables. Expect aphids when you grow these plants.
- Ants protect aphids from their natural enemies. Keep ants off plants to help these beneficial insects do their job.

How can I reduce aphids?

- Prune infested leaves and stems.
- Knock aphid populations off plants by shaking the plant or spraying it with a strong stream of water.
- Protect seedlings with covers or aluminum foil mulches.
- Wait for hot weather; some aphids are heat-intolerant and will be gone by mid-summer.

Are there any good bugs that will eat aphids?

Beneficial insects such as lady beetles and lacewings will visit plants naturally when aphids are abundant. Protect these natural enemies by avoiding the use of insecticides that can be toxic to them. Common natural enemies of aphids include:

- Lady beetles (ladybugs), both adults and larvae
- Lacewings
- Syrphid fly larvae
- Soldier beetles
- Tiny parasitic wasps that turn aphids into crusty “mummies”

What about pesticides?

- Use nonchemical methods first to manage aphid populations.
- If insecticides seem necessary, choose the safest products, such as insecticidal oils and soaps. When properly used, these materials solve most aphid problems.
- Oils and soaps work by smothering aphids, so apply these products thoroughly. Don’t apply them to drought-stressed plants or when it is very hot. Some plants are sensitive to these products.
- Apply insecticidal soaps, soap-pyrethrum mixtures, or neem oils on vegetables or small bushes such as roses.
- Narrow range horticultural oils—such as supreme or superior oils—are appropriate for larger trees.
- Oils and soaps don’t kill aphids hidden within curled leaves. Prune these out. Systemic insecticides can kill hidden aphids, but they are much more toxic and might kill bees and other beneficial insects on flowering plants.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.