



APHIDS



Aphids, or plant lice, are small, soft-bodied insects. Most aphids are about 1/10 inch long, and though green and black are the most common colors, they may be gray, brown, pink, red, yellow, or lavender. A characteristic common to all is the presence of two tubes, called cornicles, on the back ends of their bodies. The cornicles secrete defensive substances. In some species they are quite long, while in others they are very short and difficult to see.

Aphid eggs overwinter attached to plants, then hatch as nymphs in the spring. These nymphs produce eggs asexually, and produce more nymphs, who grow to maturity in one week. In the fall, nymphs will lay eggs that contain some male aphids, who will mate with the nymphs to produce the eggs that will overwinter and start the next generation of aphids.

Aphids suck the sap out of tender plant shoots and leaves. They suck the sap in through their beak-like mouths, while injecting leaves with their saliva. Drinking the sap can weaken the plant, and injecting their saliva can spread diseases from plant to plant. In addition, aphids excrete a sticky, clear substance called "honey dew" which commonly develops sooty mold. Sooty mold is unsightly and interferes with the plant's ability to photosynthesize. Sometimes, a strong blast of water from the hose will knock the aphids off of a plant and solve the problem. If you attract or purchase certain beneficials, such as lady bugs, lacewings, parasitic wasps, or damsel bugs, they will attack the aphids. Plants can also be sprayed with insecticidal soap.

Consult your local extension agent for proper pesticide use and application . (Scott Reiter 733-2686)