

Horticulture

Houseplant Insect Problems

If you have houseplants, at some time you will have a problem with insects. The most common houseplant insects are aphids, white flies, mealy bugs, thrips, scale and spider mites.

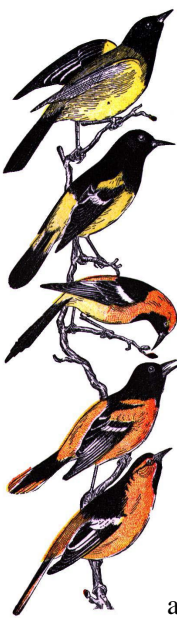
Some of these insects are so small it is difficult to see them but most can be seen without the use of a hand lens. Fortunately, most of the insects are easily controlled with insecticides. Instructions for using these insecticides will be on the label. Following these instructions carefully is important to avoid damaging your plants.

Insect damage to plants takes on various appearances. Color changes in the leaves often indicate the presence of insects. If leaves curl, dry, and die check for possible insect infestations.

Isolate new plants to be certain they are not bringing new insects into your house. Inspect your plants regularly to keep ahead of any potential insect problems. (MJM)

Ways to Attract Birds

- Plant shrubs and trees which bear fruits eaten by birds.
 - Add a birdbath to your yard.
 - Provide birdseed in feeders throughout the year.
 - Install birdhouses designed for particular species.
 - Use ground covers instead of lawn. These areas will provide an excellent hunting ground for birds that feed on worms and insects.
 - Vary vegetation heights to accommodate birds with different feeding and nesting level preferences. Some birds feed on the ground, nest in shrubs, and sing from treetops. Provide all three levels.
 - Build a small soil mound faced with a stone retaining wall. Changes in slope are highly attractive to many ground feeders and the wall will have many crevices in which birds can dig and probe for insects. Combine the mound with a garden pool for an especially attractive feature.
 - Plant flowers which produce birdseed as well as blooms. Among the many to choose from are asters, bachelors buttons, calendula, poppy, chrysanthemum, coneflowers, coreopsis, cosmos, dusty miller, marigold, phlox, portulaca, celosia, sunflower, verbena, and zinnia. (MJM)



(MJM)

Horticulture information center

NUFACTS
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
1-800-832-5441; or
441-7188 in the Lincoln area



To listen to a NUFACTS information center message, call the number above on a touch-tone phone, then enter a three-digit number listed below. Call 441-7180 to receive a brochure with all the NUFACTS message topics. (MJM)

- NUFACTS
- 117 Tree Snow Damage
 - 120 Christmas Tree Care
 - 124 Wood for Fireplace
 - 137 Deicing Salt Injury
 - 210 Amaryllis
 - 212 Swedish Ivy
 - 213 Prayer Plant
 - 214 Houseplant Insects
 - 215 Cyclamens
 - 217 Boston Fern
 - 218 African Violet Care
 - 219 Poinsettia Care
 - 220 Houseplant Leaf Yellowing
 - 221 Holiday Cactus Blooming
 - 222 Winter Houseplant Care

Winter Care of Houseplants

Winter weather adversely affects growing conditions for houseplants. Proper care during the winter months can help insure the health of houseplants. Most houseplants grow well with daytime temperatures of 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit and night temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit or rapid temperature fluctuations may damage some plants. Keep houseplants away from cold drafts and hot air vents. Also make sure houseplant foliage doesn't touch cold windows.

Many houseplants prefer a humidity level of 40 to 50 percent. Unfortunately, the relative humidity found in many homes during the winter months may be only 10 to 20 percent, a level too low for many houseplants. Humidifiers are an excellent way to increase the relative humidity in a single room or throughout the entire home. Simple cultural procedures can increase the relative humidity around houseplants. Group plants together. The water evaporating from the potting soil, plus water lost through the plant foliage or transpiration, will increase the relative humidity in the immediate vicinity of the houseplants. Another method is to place the houseplants on trays or saucers filled with pebbles or gravel and water. The bottoms of the pots should be

above the water level. Misting houseplants is not an effective method to raise relative humidity. Misting would have to be done several times daily to appreciably raise the humidity level and is simply not practical.

Houseplants require less watering during the winter months than in spring and summer. Actively growing plants



need more water than those at rest during the winter months. Plant species also affects watering frequency. Ferns prefer an evenly moist soil and should be watered frequently. Cacti and succulents, on the other hand, should not be watered until the potting soil is completely dry. The majority of houseplants fall between these two groups. Most houseplants should be watered when the soil is barely moist or

almost dry to the touch. When watering houseplants, water them thoroughly. Water should freely drain out of the bottoms of the pots. If the excess water drains into a saucer, discard the water and replace the saucer beneath the pot.

Houseplants need to be fertilized periodically when actively growing in the spring and summer. Fertilization is generally not necessary during the winter months because most plants are growing very little or resting. Indoor gardeners can begin to fertilize houseplants in March or April as growing conditions improve and the plants resume growth. Fertilizers are available in numerous forms: liquids, water soluble powders, tablets, spikes, etc. Regardless of the fertilizer type, carefully read and follow label directions.

Dust and grease often accumulate on the leaves of houseplants. The dust and grease not only makes them unattractive, it may slow plant growth. Cleaning houseplants improves their appearance, stimulates growth, and may help control insects and mites. Large, firm-leaved plants may be cleaned with a moist soft sponge or cloth. Another method is to place the plants in the shower or tub and gently wash the leaves. Be sure to adjust the water temperature before placing the plants under the shower head. (MJM)

Air Layering Tropical Plants

Air layering is a simple method of propagating indoor ornamental plants that have become overgrown. No special growing facilities are needed.

The idea behind air layering is to create a damp, temperate environment on the stem to encourage root growth. The plant will do the rest. The newly rooted branch is cut and then potted as an independent plant. Rooting time varies from a few weeks to a few months.

Tropical plants can be air layered almost any time. Roots seem to grow faster when layering is done during late winter through spring, while the

plant is actively growing. Have the following tools ready: a sharp pruning knife, moistened sphagnum moss, rooting hormone, clear piece of plastic, tape and twist ties.

Choose a branch that is at least pencil-thick. Many tropical will root anywhere along the stem, but layering at the node is recommended. Remove the leaves at the node. Make a diagonal cut one-third of the way through the stem just below the node. Angle the cut up toward the node. If you want to use a rooting hormone, dust the powder into the fresh wound.

Take a handful of wet

sphagnum moss and squeeze out the excess water. The moss should be damp, not wet. Using plenty of moss, apply it to the prepared stem and squeeze it in. Wrap the plastic around the moss. The plastic should fit snugly to maintain a moist environment as the roots grow.

Seal the vertical seam with tape. Cut the excess plastic and secure the ends with the twist ties. Leave the plant in its original environment. Water and fertilize as usual. In several weeks, roots will appear in the moss. At this point remove the plastic, cut off the newly rooted plant and pot it. (MJM)

Amaryllis Care

What do you do with amaryllis bulb you got for the holidays now that it is done flowering? Throw it out? NO! With proper care you can get it to bloom again next year.

When the flowers are done blooming, cut off the old flower stalk. Do not cut off the green leaves. Water the plant at least once a week and place it in a sunny window until spring. After the danger of frost is past, amaryllis plants can be placed outdoors in a sunny spot. Sink the pot to the rim in a flower bed among your other garden plants. The bulb is storing food for next year's flowers during this time, so proper watering, fertilization, and light will pay dividends in larger or more flowers next year.

In the fall, the amaryllis should be moved indoors before a hard frost. Watering and fertilization should be reduced and the yellowing leaves can be removed from the top of the bulb. Place the pot in a cool cellar or room to "rest" for one or two months. Move the plant to a sunny location and start watering and fertilizing once new growth begins. (MJM)

