

Invaders in the Garden – Part II – Aphids (Sep-9-2009)

By: Adeline Christie, SRS Pres. Emer. 2006 & 2007

This is the second in a series of articles on those little creepy-crawling things that play havoc in the rose garden! Although every insect plays an important role in a well-balanced eco-system, the question of what role the Aphid plays leaves many of us scratching our heads. We do know that they can cause irreparable damage to our rose plants if not stopped in their tracks, when first sighted. Leaves that appear mottled, yellowed, burnt, curled – and most noticeably – wilted, can be the beginning of the end for a rose plant. Constant attacks weaken a plant, which will, most likely, never make it through the winter.

The Aphid first appeared on this earth approximately 280 million years ago, and continues in its quest to sate its voracious appetite. The Rose Aphid can be easily recognized by its soft, pale green, oval shaped body, but it can also be black, brown and pink.

The cycle of reproduction begins in the winter when the female lays her eggs in the soil. With the arrival of spring, the over-wintering eggs of the Rose Aphids hatch and emerge from the soil as winged or wingless females. The females produce multiple generations that can live anywhere from 20 to 40 days. Therefore, one female can produce billions of offspring. It's no wonder that they can descend on a rose garden on a warm spring day and blanket the plants seemingly overnight.

Not only do aphids weaken the plant by sucking the juices out of new shoots and buds of the rose, but can overtake the entire plant spreading other diseases such as fungi, bacteria and viruses. The "honeydew" they excrete can contribute to the spread of fungi, and it has also been known to decrease the effectiveness of fungicides.

The first defense is to grab your garden hose and hose down the plant. Don't be afraid. You cannot hurt the plant and the aphids will disperse as they have an aversion to water. Rain is a god-send in many ways, but particularly in knocking the aphids off the plant causing them to die from impact or to starve. A late spring freeze is also a bit of good luck to the gardener, as it can kill off aphids, and excessive heat can produce sterility in the female aphid.

Other common enemies of the Aphid are some which you can introduce yourself in your own garden. Consider buying ladybugs, parasitic wasps, aphid lions and lace wigs from organic gardening websites. These good predatory insects can help keep the aphid population in check. Without them in your garden eco-system, aphids would rule the garden world! This is also a gentle reminder that when insecticides are used on a frequent basis in your garden, the good insects are destroyed along with the bad ones – another reason to go organic!