

Invaders in the Garden – Part I – Midge (Aug-1-2009)

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This is the first in a series of articles on the good, the bad and the ugly insects that invade our gardens. Let's start with "Midge", which many rosarians are not as familiar with, but can devastate our roses.

Just when we thought our rose bushes never looked healthier, many of us have walked through our gardens on a beautiful morning to experience the disappointment of finding withered, blackened tips on new growth and buds, killing the prospect of a flush of new blooms. It appears as though someone took a lit cigarette and burnt the tips of each new growth and tiny bud on the plant. "Midge" is the culprit, and of all the insects that plague the rose, none is more difficult to control.

The "Midge" are small, delicate flies that resemble mosquitoes, but do not bite. They often will be seen in large swarms over water or lawns. The adult female "Midge", is most active in mid-May and again in July, when it lays its eggs inside the sepals of flower buds or leafy tips. The larvae then hatch from the eggs and feast on the rose tips and buds, leaving the "burnt" tips and damaged buds in their wake.

The full-grown larvae measure approximately 1.8 mm long. The pupae have been known to be spotted in the rose tips, but normally are found in the soil. When the adults emerge from the pupae stage early in the spring and again in mid-summer, it is exactly at the time when the rose plant is producing new growth and rose buds.

Unfortunately, Midge continues to reproduce and live in the soil until early fall, when they move into their cocoon stage and finally over-winter in the soil.

A product manufactured by Bayer – "Dual Action Rose & Flower Insect Killer Concentrate" – is effective in killing on contact and provides systemic protection that lasts up to two times longer than competitive products lasting for weeks. This product can be found at most Home Depot stores.

An alternative, less-toxic treatment is "Insecticidal Soap". As with any spraying program, it's best to apply in the early morning or late afternoon, and the best results are with continued soil treatments and foliar spraying.

Remember to apply insecticides for Midge in mid-May and early July, since this is the best time to control their exuberant proliferation.