

# Controlling Insects on Indoor Plants

## Preventing Insects

Insect infestations can be discouraged by washing plants every two or three weeks. Rinse them in the sink or shower, or under a hose outdoors in the summer. Wipe large, cumbersome plants clean with a soft, wet cloth or sponge, paying close attention to the undersides of the leaves. Regular bathing also improves the overall health and appearance of the plant by removing dirt and dust from the pores. Pasteurized soil should always be used when repotting plants.

Pests often find their way into the home on newly purchased plants. Store-bought plants should be inspected carefully for signs of infestation before being brought home. Plants placed outdoors for the summer are liable to be host to insects by summer's end. Inspect them carefully and wash down plants thoroughly before bringing indoors in fall.

## Controlling Insects

**Aphids** - this common indoor pest is also found outdoors in summer. Soft bodied insects are pear shaped and can be black, clear, yellow, green. Severe infestations will cause curling/distorting of foliage, and flowers to wilt and drop. With heavy infestation a clear sticky residue will be noticeable on the leaves ('honeydew' from the aphids). Plants should be washed down thoroughly and sprayed with insecticidal soap.



**Spider Mites** - these tiny mites love dry, hot areas. Will cause tiny dots (stipples) in foliage, and a yellow haze on foliage. Keeping plants humid by misting with water or placing pots on pebble filled trays with water is a great preventative measure. If heavily infested, rinse plants well, then spray with insecticidal soap. Ensure product you are using is listed for use on mites. Sticky traps can also be placed around plants to trap adults.



**Whitefly** - These small powdery white insects will fly away in groups when disturbed. They use their needle-like mouthparts to pierce leaves and extract sap. Leaves will appear speckled and eventually turn yellow and wilt. Like aphids, whitefly excrete a honeydew like substance onto leaves.



Whitefly can be difficult to control; spray plants with Neem Oil or Doktor Doom House and Garden spray. Repeated applications every few weeks may be required.



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**Mealy Bug** - These cottony insects use mouthparts to pierce and suck sap from leaves, causing foliage to yellow. The cottony coating is hard to penetrate, making these insects difficult to control. Use a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol to treat individual insects. Plants may also be sprayed with Neem Oil or Doktor Doom House and Garden spray; these residual insecticides are much more effective at treating mealybug than insecticidal soap. If infestation has gotten quite severe, plants are best disposed of.



**Scale** - these hard shelled insects resemble little armadillos. They pierce foliage and extract sap, causing foliage to yellow and wither. They are often found on the undersides of leaves, and will exude a sticky substance onto leaves. Scale are easily scraped off a leaf with a fingernail; if infestations are large then plants can be sprayed with Neem Oil or Doktor Doom House and Garden spray. Plants can also be watered in with Neem Oil for extra control.



**Thrips** - these small insects have a thin narrow body and are often referred to as resembling a hyphen. They leave white blotches and streaks on foliage and blooms. Very difficult to control; place sticky traps around plants to attract and trap adults, and spray plants with Doktor Doom House and Garden insecticide or Neem Oil. These residual insecticides are much more effective in controlling thrips than insecticidal soap.



### Soil Insects

**Fungus Gnats** - Fungus Gnats are the most frequent houseplant annoyance and are distinguished from common Fruit Flies because of their darker color. While Fruit Flies hang out primarily in exposed fruit or around rotten food you'll find Fungus Gnats in wet plant soil and possibly in household drains.



Adult Fungus Gnats live a week and a half, and in that span *can lay up to 200 eggs each* in moist soil. The eggs hatch in 4 to 6 days and feed on plant roots in their larval stage for about 2 weeks. They love moist, compost-rich potting soils.

Think you have Fungus Gnats but want to be really sure? Here's a trick: Cut a potato into 1/2 inch slices and set on top of the soil. Fungus Gnat larvae are attracted to the potato and will move to the surface to feed on it. In a couple days, check the slices, and discard if engulfed with larvae.



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## Control

- Because Fungus Gnats need moist soil in order to complete this four-week life cycle, allow the soil to dry out completely in between waterings. Since watering can be difficult to keep completely precise, there are other ways to control gnats

- Pour a generous layer of sand on top of the soil. Fungus Gnats are attracted to the top layer of wet soil. Because sand drains quickly, adults are confused by the newly dry top layer of soil, even though your plant is perfectly watered.

- Spray soil surface with Schultz Fungus Gnat spray; as nymphs try to emerge from soil they contact the residue from the spray and are killed.

- The above methods will control the larvae, now the adults. Place sticky traps in and around plants. This sticky yellow paper will quickly trap the pesky flying insects and prevent them from laying more eggs. Schultz Fungus Gnat Spray can also be used; spray foliage and stems of plant to help control adults.

**Millipedes, Springtails** - Millipedes are mostly scavengers, feeding on decaying vegetation, however, they will feed on small roots, bulbs and seedlings. They may multiply in the soil to the extent that they overcrowd the pot and migrate out in search of new host plants. This is often the first indication that the soil is infested with millipedes.

Springtails are common soil inhabitants often found in houseplant soil. They can be seen hopping on the surface after watering. They thrive in moist soil where they feed on decaying organic matter. Their presence is often an indication of over watering. If numerous, they may attack seedlings or tender plant parts, but damage is often minimal. To control millipedes or springtails, simply repot plants with sterilized potting soil.



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