

## Aphids and Sticky Plants

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Aphids are a common pest of many plants in the vegetable and flower garden and on landscape plants. In most cases, they are more of a nuisance and control is often not needed for plant health.

Since aphids are born alive and can be pregnant when born (yes, you read that right), aphid numbers increase very rapidly before a plant grower notices them.

Signs of aphid feeding include sticky plants that may appear shiny, a black sooty mold growing on leaves, or curled and twisted leaves that may be sticky. Leaf yellowing or poor plant vigor are symptoms.

Aphids feed in masses on plant sap. They cannot digest all of the sugar in sap and exude it out of their bodies as honeydew. This creates the sticky residue and is what sooty mold grows on. This black mold does not harm plants. If it is dense enough, leaves may yellow from a lack of light.

Another sign of aphids are the presence exoskeletons they shed as they grow. These are seen as white cast skins found on leaves or stuck in the aphid's honeydew.

Aphids feed from leaf undersides so the bottoms of leaves need to be inspected to find them. They are tiny, pear-shaped, soft-bodied insects. Depending on the type of aphid, they range in color from green, red, pinkish, black, yellow and gray. Mature aphids may have wings or be without wings.

A key characteristic of all aphids is they have two tail pipes (cornicles), often black, protruding from the ends of their abdomen. On some aphids, the cornicles are quite small and hard to see.

In the vegetable garden, I most commonly have questions about aphids on cabbage and peppers, although many types of vegetables can be infested. This year seems to be the year for aphids on peppers.

If the leaves and fruit of garden peppers are very sticky, they are infested with aphids. Again, aphid control is optional. And it is late in the season to attempt control with regular insecticides during harvest.

You can ignore aphids or reduce their numbers by spraying leaf undersides with a strong stream of water from a garden hose or with an insecticidal soap purchased from a garden center. Insecticidal soaps only work if they contact the insects.

Another common aphid is oleander aphid found on milkweeds. With more milkweeds being planted for Monarch butterflies, we are seeing an increase in oleander aphids which are orange-yellow in color.

These aphids are usually found massed on the upper stems of milkweeds and are easier to see. They also will not harm plants in the long run. Their numbers are best kept in check with water from a garden hose or an insecticidal soap.

There are a number of beneficial insects, like lady beetles, lacewings and braconid wasps that help keep aphid numbers in check. In gardens or landscapes where insecticides are used on a regular basis, we often see aphid numbers increasing due to the loss of predators which are also killed by insecticides.

For this reason, use insecticides responsibly. Always identify the true cause of a plant issue or an insect when found to determine if control is even needed. When possible, avoid unnecessary pesticide applications or use low risk pesticides like insecticidal soaps.