

Greenfly

GWF299

Updated February 2009

Greenfly in large numbers can wreak havoc in the garden, but there are many ways to protect your plants from serious damage.

Q What are greenfly?

A Greenfly are one of the commonest garden pests. They are found on all types of plants, and thrive outside or under cover. They feed by sucking sap through fine tubular mouthparts which they insert into the plants' cells. Greenfly are part of the larger group known as aphids, which also includes blackfly, root aphids and woolly aphids. There are many kinds, each with different host plants and life cycles. Most occur in small numbers and do little harm; only very few behave as pests. They spread on the breeze, and tend to settle in sheltered sites so gardens suit them very well.

Q How do I recognise them?

A Greenfly are teardrop-shaped, 1-3mm long, have six legs and may or may not have wings. They usually occur in large clusters on soft plant tissues such as new shoots and the undersides of leaves.

Q Are they always green?

A Not really. There are many types of greenfly - with seven species on roses alone - and they can be yellow, blue-green or pinky-brown as well as green. Other aphids may be grey, brown or black. Whitefly are also sap-

suckers but are not closely related. They are smaller than greenfly and have white wings as well as white bodies, whereas greenfly wings are transparent.

Q What damage do they do?

A Small numbers of greenfly do very little damage, but in larger concentrations they can take so much sap from shoots that the young growth becomes distorted, flowers and fruit may be damaged or even abort, and conifers shed their needles.

Greenfly also excrete a surplus sugar solution, known as honeydew. This creates sticky patches on plants and is frequently colonised by a fungus called sooty mould that turns the foliage black. While sooty mould does not directly damage plants it is unsightly. It can also block out light from the leaves and interfere with the plant's ability to make sugars by photosynthesis.

Q Do greenfly spread disease?

A Yes, greenfly and other aphids are important carriers or vectors for virus diseases of plants. As virus infections cannot be cured, the only way to protect plants is to prevent them getting infected.

Q How do I control greenfly?

A There are a range of ways to

prevent greenfly from damaging your plants.

Physical removal - Squashing greenfly may be messy, but it's quick and effective. Alternatively you can dislodge them with a jet of water, or prune off the worst affected shoots.

Barriers - Fleece or insect-proof mesh will exclude them, and may be worth using on vegetables and other low-growing crops such as strawberries or herbs.

Biological controls - These can be used to control greenfly in confined spaces such as in greenhouses or under cloches.

There are two types, both midges. *Aphidolytes* is a predator and best at dealing with large numbers of greenfly; *Aphidius* is a parasite and good at hunting down smaller numbers.

Insecticides - contact types will only kill greenfly that they come into contact with, so it is important to spray thoroughly. Try products that contain bifenthrin, fatty acids, pyrethrins, rape seed oil, such as Bayer Organic Pest Control, Bug Free or BugClear Gun! For Fruit and Veg. Systemic types give better control on difficult to spray plants but you need to check the packet carefully to make sure they are approved for use on the plants you want to spray. Try products that contain imidacloprid or thiacloprid, such

as Provado Ultimate Bug Killer Aerosol.

Natural predators - Many birds, especially blue tits, will devour greenfly, so are worth encouraging. Even seed-eaters like sparrows take greenfly to feed their chicks. Predatory insects like ladybirds and their larvae, lacewings, hoverfly larvae and earwigs all hunt and eat greenfly. Biological controls and even some fungal diseases also help control greenfly numbers.

Q I've seen ants running around over greenfly - do they eat them?

A No, ants protect greenfly from predators. This is because they milk them for the sweet honeydew that they use as food. Ants may also move greenfly to new feeding grounds. There's not much you can do about this - in fact ant activity can often be a useful early warning that greenfly numbers are building up.

Q What is the greenfly lifecycle?

A Greenfly overwinter as eggs on host plants or as adults in sheltered spots outside, or under glass. In spring and early summer adult females give birth to live young without mating. The young are all female so numbers can build up very quickly. In fact, newly born greenfly already carry more young ones inside them.

When the population is high, if there are predators about, or the greenfly are ready to move to different plants, then winged greenfly develop. Once settled on their new hosts the winged forms lose their wings and give rise to

wingless greenfly again. They continue to produce more young, including some males, and as day length shortens and temperatures fall in autumn, they mate and produce eggs that will overwinter.

Some greenfly, such as the rose aphid, spend their whole lives on one type of plant. Others, such as the willow-carrot aphid have two hosts, spending winter and spring on one, then move off elsewhere for the summer. This is one reason why large infestations of greenfly can suddenly disappear - or you may see serious damage but no signs of the insects.

Q Can I get more information about specific greenfly and other aphids?

A Contact us for any of the following factsheets:

Aphids on apples and pears
GWF224

Aphids on cherry and plum
GWF442

Aphids on soft fruit GWF448

Aphids on vegetables GWF207

Blackfly GWF308

Root aphids GWF255

Biological Control suppliers

Biowise

Hoyle Depot, Graffham,

Petworth, West Sussex

GU28 0LR

01798 867574

www.biowise-biocontrol.co.uk

Defenders Ltd

Occupation Road, Wye,

Ashford, Kent TN25 5EN

01233 813121

www.defenders.co.uk

Green Gardener

Brook Hill,

Brundall Wood,

Blofield NR13 4LB

01603 715096

www.greengardener.co.uk

Harrod Horticultural
Pinbush Road, Lowestoft,
Suffolk NR33 7NL

0845 402 5300

www.harrodhorticultural.com

Just Green

Unit 14 Springfield Industrial

Estate, Burnham-on-Crouch,

Essex CM0 8UA

01621 785088

www.just-green.com

The Organic Gardening Catalogue

Riverdene Business Park,

Molesey Road,

Hersham, Surrey KT12 4RG

0845 130 1304

www.organiccatalog.com

Scarletts

Nayland Road, West Bergholt,

Colchester,

Essex CO6 3DH

01206 240466

www.scarletts.co.uk

Suppliers of insect-proof mesh

Agralan

01285 860015

www.agralan.co.uk

DT Brown

0845 166 2275

www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk

Ferndale Lodge

0870 444 1342

www.ferndale-lodge.co.uk

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