

Rose pests

GWF474

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Of all rose pests, aphids cause the most damage, but a range of other insects can also affect their growth, health and appearance.

Q Which insects can damage rose flowers?

A Aphids and capsid bugs can damage buds so that they fail to develop. Damage from thrips and rose chafers shows up clearly once the flowers are open.

Q What should I know about aphids?

A Aphids are usually wingless and 1mm to 3mm long. They're often called greenfly, though they can be other colours. At least seven species of aphid attack roses, the most troublesome of which is the rose aphid, *Macrosiphon rosae*, which can be dark-green or pinky-brown. In small numbers they do little harm, but they can occur in large masses on shoot tips and suck sap from the vulnerable young growth. This deprives the developing shoot of water and nutrients, so buds fail to open and foliage is distorted.

Q How do I control them?

A The simplest way to kill aphids is to squash them. Ladybirds and their larvae, as well as lacewing larvae and hover-fly larvae, feed voraciously on aphids, so encouraging these into the garden will help. Small birds, especially blue tits, also eat large numbers. If you need to spray, try Multirose, BugClear, Growing

Success or Nature's Answer Natural Fungus and Bug Killer. All these insecticides will only kill insects they actually contact, and organic ones break down quickly, so repeat spraying will be needed. Even organic insecticides will harm beneficial insects, so remove ladybirds etc first, and spray after dusk to avoid harming bees. Clusters of shiny black overwintering aphid eggs can be scraped off stems or pruned out.

Q Tell me more about capsid-bug damage.

A Capsid bugs are bigger than aphids, up to 5mm long, but they are much more mobile and do not congregate in large numbers; in fact, they are rarely seen. However, their sap-sucking activities can kill unopened flower buds, turning them brown and dry. They can also damage leaves when still in bud, killing small areas of tissue where the leaves are punctured. When the leaves open, these dead areas tear, leaving characteristic jagged holes, often clustered near the main vein.

Q How do I prevent capsid damage?

A By the time you see the damage, the capsids are usually long gone. Badly damaged shoots should be pruned back to

encourage new growth. If it is a frequent problem, spraying with a general purpose insecticide in spring may help.

Q How do I recognise thrip damage?

A If the petals are blackened, with mottling and distortion, this is likely to have been caused by the rose thrip, *Thrips fuscipennis*. Thrips, also known as thunderflies, are small, narrow insects just 2mm long, slightly wider at the front end. They tend to jump away when disturbed, though you can usually confirm their presence by shaking an affected shoot over a sheet of white paper. They are more of a problem in a hot summer and, if you notice a lot of damage early in the season, spray with a general-purpose insecticide to reduce future damage.

Q Tell me more about rose chafers.

A If the petals are completely eaten away, often more on one side of the flower than the other, then this is the work of the rose chafer (*Cetonia aurata*). This is a beautiful large iridescent green-and-red beetle which hides away during the day, so you will probably not see it. The damage they cause to the plant as a whole is slight, and there is no

need to take any action other than to remove damaged flowers to encourage new ones to form.

Q Which insects damage rose leaves?

A Again, aphids are the main culprit; they distort the young foliage. They also excrete sticky honeydew, which makes the leaves shiny and attracts black sooty mould.

Q What causes holes in the leaves?

A Capsids, caterpillars, slugworms and leaf-cutter bees all cause characteristic holes in rose leaves. **Capsids** create jagged, irregular holes. **Caterpillars** produce irregular-shaped holes with rounded edges. Caterpillars are the larvae of a small range of moths that feed on ornamental plants. If the damage can be tolerated, then take no action. If it is severe, then pick off the offenders and move them to less valued plants, or squash them. (Wear gloves if they are hairy.) Alternatively, spray with BugClear, BugFree, Multirose Ready to use, Sprayday Greenfly Killer Plus, or Provado Ultimate Bug Killer Ready to use.

Slugworms eat away at the surface of a leaf, leaving just the veins. The 1cm-long green grub, also known as a skeletoniser, is the larva of the **rose slug sawfly** (*Endelomyia aethiops*). They tend to demolish one leaf entirely before moving on to the next. You can pick them off, or use a contact insecticide, but the level of damage rarely warrants any action. **Leaf-cutter bees** (*Megachile centuncularis*) remove neat semi-circular pieces of leaf about 1cm across to build their nests. Their activities peak in June. The damage is not serious and you need take no action.

Q Can insects be responsible for leaf speckling?

A Leaf speckling can be caused by leaf hoppers or spider mites. **Leafhoppers** (*Edwardsiana rosae*) cause whitish mottling as a result of sucking sap from the leaf. The insects are about 3mm long, pale-yellow and jump off when disturbed. Numbers can build up in sheltered areas, such as against a wall, to the point where the leaves turn almost white. Serious attacks can be treated with the same insecticides as aphids. **Spider mites** (*Tetranychus urticae*) also suck sap from leaves,

resulting in pale-yellow speckling or overall bronzing. Look for minute (0.5mm), slow-moving mites and scraps of webbing between the leaflets. Spider mites thrive in hot, dry conditions, so try moving roses in containers to cooler positions and spray plants with water. If this does not control the problem, repeated sprays of pyrethrum-based insecticides, or fatty acid soaps, can also be effective.

Q What causes rolled-up leaves?

A Leaf-rolling sawfly (*Blennocolpa phyllocolpa*) lays its eggs in May/June on the underside of the leaf. It injects a chemical which induces the leaf to roll up and protect the egg, and then the larva when it hatches. Attacks are more common in the south of the country, and some rose varieties including 'Albertine', 'New Dawn', Queen Elizabeth' and 'Peace', are particularly susceptible. Bad attacks can look unattractive but do little harm. Pick off any occupied tunnels before July, when the larvae leave to pupate in the soil.