

Insects: FAQ-Why are the leaves on my roses all sticky and how can I get rid of it and keep it from happening again?

That stickiness is called “honeydew” and is produced by aphids. Aphids are soft-bodied insects, about one-tenth of an inch long, with wings or without, and can be just about any color, but are often light green, yellow, or brown. They eat the succulent, fresh, new growth on plants and then secrete the sweet, sticky honeydew which attracts and is eaten by ants, bees and flies. Honeydew also encourages a black, sooty mold to grow on many plants.

How to get rid of aphids:

- **Wash them off!** A strong spray of water from a garden hose or a spray bottle can be pretty effective if you're persistent. Then prune off any foliage that's badly damaged.
- **Spray them with an insecticidal soap.** These soaps are the least toxic method of chemical control of aphids and are available at most lawn and garden stores. The soap is only effective if it is sprayed directly on the aphids, so be sure to check and spray underneath the leaves, too, and always follow label instructions.
- **Introduce or encourage aphid predators.** Don't use strong pesticides that could harm aphid predators such as ladybeetles or green lacewings. And don't buy adult ladybeetles, however, as they tend to leave the area when they're released. Consider purchasing the green lacewing as eggs, or in larvae form. Also, grow plants that will attract these predator insects including yarrow, wild buckwheat, white sweet clover, tansy, sweet fennel, sweet alyssum, spearmint, Queen Anne's lace, hairy vetch, flowering buckwheat, crimson clover, cowpeas, common knotweed and caraway.
- **Don't over-fertilize.** Too much nitrogen fertilizer produces lots of fresh, new growth on plants which the aphids love. Keep plants healthy with adequate supplies of nutrients, water and light and use slow-release or organic fertilizers to avoid overdosing your plants with nutrients.
- **Use yellow sticky aphid traps.** These traps are sold in garden stores and use a non-toxic sticky substance but can only trap the flying aphids.

If you absolutely can't get rid of your aphids using these methods, at least outsmart them with your landscape design. Don't put any plants that attract aphids where their honeydew will do harm. For example, since aphids are drawn to birches, don't plant these trees near your driveway, patio, or deck to avoid having your vehicles and patio furniture covered in their sticky honeydew!

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