

Potted Plant Pests

By E Vinje



Unlike plants grown in the ground, potted plants enjoy a relatively pest-free environment. In most cases, they are potted in quality soils or soilless mixes, and are often grown closer at hand, so they are inspected more frequently. As a result, they tend to have fewer problems with insects and disease.

With that said, there's no predicting what could attack your plants. Just because they are confined to pots does not mean that they will be excluded from pest problems. Insects can creep into any garden and fungal spores are present in the air at all times. While the chances of potted plant pests are much smaller with container gardens, you still need to take precautions.

- Purchase only healthy plants and thoroughly wash them before planting. Many insects gain entry (especially indoors) on new plants.
- Always plant in a clean growing media and in clean containers. Do not reuse potting mixes.
- Grow plants in the conditions they prefer (i.e., give them proper sunlight, nutrients and water).

Healthy plants are better able to resist insect and disease problems.

- Wash your hands and garden tools after handling infected plants. Insects and fungus often travel from plant to plant on dirty tools.
- Remove severely infested plants. Plants that have had more than half of their leaves damaged are probably not worth saving.

No matter how careful you are, sooner or later you may have to deal with a pest problem of some sort. When that happens, don't send out an SOS. Think IPM. That stands for Integrated Pest Management and it's a great way to conduct organic pest control.

IPM combines various techniques to produce a long term control of the pest population. It consists of the following:

- 1.) Monitoring for pests on a regular basis.

Tip: Since most container plants need to be watered daily, use

this time to check over the leaves, paying close attention to the undersides of leaves.

- 2.) Identifying the pest and understanding its life-cycle so that treatment can be chosen and timed to be most effective.
- 3.) Establishing a tolerable threshold of injury. The emphasis is on control, not eradication.
- 4.) If action is required, begin with safe and sensible pest control measures that are the least harmful to you and the environment.

When growing in containers, it is often easier to handpick larger pests — like caterpillars, slugs and snails. Problems with smaller pests, like spider mites, aphids and whitefly, can be tougher to control and may spread several plant diseases. To combat these pests, I suggest products for organic pest control.

Tip: Sometimes a heavy stream of water from a garden hose is all that is needed to reduce many pest infestations.