



Tips for Natural and Organic Aphid Pest Control

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It's spring! Our gardens are bursting with new, tender leaf growth and flower buds, which also attract aphids. In most cases, aphids don't cause much damage to your plants. You can often ignore them, and they can even be a positive sign of a healthy garden ecosystem! But when that threshold of tolerance has been reached, how can you reduce their populations in ways that support the garden's ecology?

Once you properly identify that the aphids are indeed the culprit of your plant woes, you can begin to prevent the infestation from increasing with an [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\)](#) approach. With an IPM approach, you create balance in your garden with pesticide-free, holistic actions [pesticide-free in home gardens makes the most sense; however, IPM in larger or commercial operations can include the thoughtful and careful use of pesticides, within a holistic framework]. Reaching for a pesticide, though convenient, can do more harm than good, even the eco-friendly ones. It is rare to need a pesticide in our gardens. Pesticides are great at killing the pest, but they can also kill the beneficial predator populations, which means more aphids on your plants.

Let's look at managing aphids through the lens of IPM. Once you have identified that yes, those are aphids causing a problem on my plant, then:

1. Begin by wiping them off, either with your fingers or blast them off with a strong stream of water from a spray bottle or with your garden hose.
2. Prune off the heavily infested pieces.
3. Plant a nice variety of insectary plants to invite beneficial predators, such as ladybugs, lacewings, and syrphid flies, as well as parasitoids. The larvae of each LOVE to eat aphids and other garden pests, however the adults of each require nectar and pollen to feed on so to attract these friends to your garden plant a variety of flowers. My favorites are cosmos, coreopsis, asters, sunflowers, zinnias, and letting the herbs I grow go to flower, like cilantro, parsley, mint, and thyme.
4. Help your plant live its best life possible by planting it in a location of your garden that it is best suited for. Make sure it is receiving enough sunlight or shade, that it is properly



Syrphid Fly larva eating aphids



Ladybug larva

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irrigated, that the root zone is healthy, and that if it does need fertilizing that it is fed organically to further increase the health of the plant.

Keep in mind that aphids are seasonal and to be expected. I personally get excited when I see aphids arrive on my plants because I know that they are food for the beneficial predators that I have invited. I also know that the plants in my garden are getting the care they need to thrive, so they are somewhat tolerant to pest outbreaks. However, if I see a significant population of aphids on a plant, then it's a clue that something else is going on. Perhaps the irrigation is broken, or the base of the plant is buried with debris, or something else is causing my plant stress. I then investigate to address the cause, correct the problem at hand, then monitor.

Working with your garden and the ecosystem beyond it requires resilience. It may be easier to apply a pesticide than to practice patience, but I can assure you that it is worth it.

Happy gardening!



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