

Combatting Garden Pests – Whiteflies

These annoying pests have been a problem for many years. There are several different kinds, but the control method is basically the same for all. The most easily recognized pest is the Giant Whitefly which was brought in by accident about 20 years ago. It also produces the most visible sign of its existence because it creates a white stringy, hair-like substance that covers some plants. Hibiscus is probably the primary host plant; however whiteflies are attracted to many other ornamentals in Southern California.

A related fungus often grows from the droppings of the whitefly, called sooty mold. It is black and usually covers the top of the leaf. The whitefly is found on the bottom. If you gain control of the whitefly, the sooty mold should gradually disappear with new plant growth.

Two predators have been released in our area, one is a tiny wasp, and the other is a very tiny beetle. Both are smaller than a comma mark on this page and difficult to see. In some cases, these predators have been helpful.

If you can't gain control by hosing off the plants several times a week with a strong stream of water, there are sprays that will help. When spraying, be sure to read the label directions and be sure to spray in an upward direction to get as much under the leaf as possible because that is where the whitefly live and suck the juices of the plant from. Try using a spreader sticker that will give better applications with concentrates.

If using insecticides, it is important to spray at least three times a day at five day intervals to break up the life cycles of these pests. None of the sprays will kill the eggs which could hatch a day or two after you spray. The whiteflies become mature and can reproduce in about seven days which is why it is important to spray every five days. See some of the Bayer labels for control. You can also apply a layer of Worm Gold under the plants twice a year to reduce or probably eliminate all of the white fly on those plants.

After you get control or reasonable control, should you see signs of reinfestation, spray immediately or begin to hose down plants with a strong stream of water.