

Rosemania Recommends:

How to Battle the Bad Bugs

By: Logan Shillinglaw

This is the time of year when everyone starts to ask what should be done about controlling the insects in their rose garden. There are two very simple answers. The first is "Don't spray insecticides unless you have an insect problem". The second is "If you have an insect problem, use the right product for the insect". People are usually so surprised by my first answer that they don't hear my second answer. Let's look at each one.

Don't spray insecticides unless you have an insect problem. That seems to fly in the face of the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, but quite honestly it makes a lot of sense. Mother Nature has a way of trying to protect your garden. There are "good" bugs and "bad" bugs. If you spray insecticides every time you spray for disease prevention, you are going to kill off those good bugs. Insects such as *lady bugs*, *praying mantis* and *green lacewings* all help your garden by giving a certain amount of natural insect control. All three help control aphids - those small green insects that suck the juice from your tender new growth leaving it heavily damaged. Lady bugs will also help control spider mites while praying mantis feast on caterpillars and other soft bodied insects. (Be sure to check our website for more information on these beneficial insects.)

If you spray insecticides on a preventative basis, you may kill the bad bugs but you will also destroy the good bugs by either killing them or killing off their food source forcing them to leave your garden. This allows the bad bugs to "re-establish" a presence. They will re-enter your garden and reproduce on a shorter cycle than your regular spray program. With no natural predators, aphids and spider mites multiply and you end up with a larger insect population that requires insecticide use.

Some folks have asked, "Well can't I just spray a miticide each time I spray? That way I won't kill the beneficial insects but I will

kill those pesky mites." Sounds good in theory but there is one major flaw in that approach. Mites can quickly develop resistance to miticides when overused. The end result is that you may knock them down in the beginning but you can count on them establishing an even stronger presence over time. One last reason to not spray insecticides and/or miticides unless you have an insect problem - who really wants to be using these chemicals unless you really need to do so?

If you have an insect problem, use the right product for the insect. At the beginning of the season, aphids are my concern and they tend to outnumber the natural insect population so when I see them, I use *Merit*. This product has given me great results with not only aphids but also white fly and in the summer, I use it to kill Japanese beetles on contact. *Orthene* is a general insecticide that will kill aphids. While it costs less, it tends to be less effective than *Merit*, has a more negative effect on my natural predators and it doesn't kill Japanese beetles. If cucumber beetles (those creatures that look like green lady bugs) become a problem, then *Mavrik* is the solution. Neither *Merit* or *Othene* will kill cucumber beetles.

As spring moves into summer, spider mites become a problem in many areas of the country. You should regularly check your roses for spider mites. The heat shortens the spider mite's reproductive cycle so they can easily outnumber the natural predators and establish a presence in your garden. They are difficult to see and in many cases you can have a severe infestation before you know it. They will be living and reproducing on the underside of the leaves so check there for small moving dots. My eyesight isn't what it was in my younger days so I feel under the leaves. If there is a grainy feel then I know there are mites in my garden and it's time to spray. There are two ways to approach mites - killing the live mites and killing the eggs. If you have just a few roses, a strong blast of water to the underside of the leaves can help disrupt their cycle. It won't kill them but it may help control them. If you have more than a few roses then you need to have a miticide in your arsenal.

Avid is a proven performer when it comes to killing the adult mite. You need to be sure to

spray *Avid* every three days for three to four applications. This is necessary because while you kill the adults, their eggs will still hatch and produce new adults which will continue the cycle by producing more eggs. The multiple applications knock out the adults. If you want to kill the eggs before they hatch you want to add an ovicide like *Hexygon*. If you want to kill the live adults AND the eggs with one spray then *Floramite SC* is the solution. It is a miticide and ovicide in one spray. An added benefit is that it has a 21 day residual effect. In many gardens, just a couple of uses all summer and mites are no longer a problem. This is clearly the best mite product on the market.

One very common insect in many gardens is the thrip. This insect looks like a tiny wood splinter and it does its damage from inside your bloom. You usually notice their presence when your blooms fail to open properly. If you open up the petals you'll see them down in the bloom. They suck the juice from the petals leaving lighter colored blooms to look unnaturally dark and with the substance of wet tissue paper. *Conserve SC* is the answer to thrips in my garden. The active ingredient in *Conserve* is spinosad, a soil dwelling bacteria. While great at combating thrips, army worms, bag worms, and bud worms, it does not harm any beneficial insects or predatory mites (the mites that eat the spider mites). For this reason, *Conserve* is the "exception to the rule" and may be used preventatively. I begin adding *Conserve* to my regular fungicide program once new buds begin to form and continue until mid summer. I then discontinue use until early fall or until I see evidence of thrip damage. Mix *Conserve* at a rate of 1/3 teaspoon per gallon of spray solution. Unfortunately, *Conserve* is only available in quarts. The good news: One bottle makes over 500 gallons of spray solution and the self life is five years!

I find all insecticides and miticides work best when a spreader-sticker like *Indicate-5* is added to the spray solution. One last and very important point - **always wear protective clothing, disposable gloves and a respirator when spraying any pesticide!**

Remember - know your garden and know what works for you.