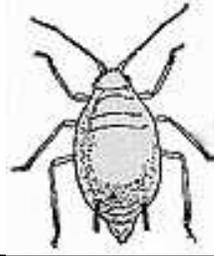


## Bug-Wise

No. 21  
September 8, 2004



Office: 1-662-325-2085

**Crape Myrtle Aphids:** During late summer and early fall it is not uncommon to see crape myrtles that are sticky with honeydew and/or black with sooty mold. This is due to infestations of the crape myrtle aphid, *Tinocallis kahawalukalani*, which is the most common insect pest of these popular landscape plants. This is a rather unique situation because crape myrtle is not seriously attacked by any other species of aphids and crape myrtle aphid does not occur on any other species of plants. It is specific to crape myrtle.

This aphid is also unusual in that it has very few parasites to help keep its numbers in check, which explains why it is often able to develop to such high numbers. However, the Asian lady beetle is a voracious predator of crape myrtle aphids. Large numbers of larvae, pupae, and adults can usually be seen on aphid-infested trees, and this is the primary insect responsible for biological control of crape myrtle aphids. This predator is a relatively new arrival to our state, and, despite the problems that it causes as a 'home invader' during the winter and spring, it has had a positive impact in reducing the incidence of aphid problems on crape myrtles.

Although most crape myrtle trees can be infested with aphids, some varieties of crape myrtles are more susceptible than others. This is especially true of the pure 'indica' types, while some of the more recent hybrids are more resistant. This explains why one tree or planting of crape myrtles may be heavily infested with aphids, while another tree or planting in the same landscape is relatively aphid free. Natchez is one example of a variety that is less prone to aphid problems, but there are others and susceptibility to aphids is one factor that should definitely be considered when choosing crape myrtle varieties.

Crape myrtle aphids can be controlled with foliar insecticide sprays, but because of the effort and problems involved, most gardeners view this as a treatment of last resort. One of the problems with spraying aphids is that their numbers often rebound quickly following a treatment. Still there are times when a tree or planting becomes so heavily infested that treatment is necessary. Foliar sprays of insecticidal soap or horticultural oils will control aphids and also aid in loosening accumulations of sooty mold. However, depending on weather conditions, it can take quite a while for sooty mold to disappear after an aphid infestation has been controlled. Systemic insecticides are generally more effective than contact insecticides. Two products that contain systemic insecticides are: Bayer Advanced Garden Rose & Flower Spray, which contains a pyrethroid insecticide as well as the systemic ingredient imidacloprid, and Ortho Systemic Insect Killer, which contains the systemic insecticide acephate as well as a miticide. Foliar sprays are generally more feasible on dwarf varieties, or small newly established trees, but can be applied to larger trees by using appropriate power sprayers or 'tree & shrub type' hose-end sprayers.

An easier way to treat for aphids is to apply a soil drench of imidacloprid, using the Bayer Advanced Garden Tree & Shrub product. This treatment is best applied preventatively. Because this treatment is applied through the soil, control can be slow and somewhat erratic, but it has the advantage of being less disruptive to lady beetles and other predators than a foliar spray. Obviously, it is not necessary to treat every crape myrtle on the landscape. Only those trees that routinely have problems require treatment.

**Now is the ideal time to tag or make a note of aphid-prone trees, as evidenced by high aphid numbers or excessive amounts of honeydew or sooty mold, so that they can be targeted for treatment this fall and/or next spring.**

**Phorid Flies:** Phorid flies are one of the most common causes of complaints about “little black gnats or flies” occurring in the home or work place. These are small dark brown flies that are less than 1/8 of an inch long. They are about the same size as fruit flies and are often mistaken for fruit flies because of their small size and the type of habitats in which they occur. However, they do not have the red eyes that are characteristic of fruit flies, and also differ in a number of other ways that are apparent under close examination.

The larvae of phorid flies breed in moist decaying organic matter. Fruit flies also breed in similar sites and the two species sometimes occur together. **When phorid flies occur indoors, eliminating their breeding site(s) is the only way to effectively address the problem.** Finding these breeding sites can take some careful searching, and thinking. Keep in mind that any type of decaying organic matter can provide a breeding source. In some cases eliminating phorid fly infestations can be as simple as finding and removing a rotten piece of fruit or vegetable that has rolled under or behind an appliance or some other out of the way place, or emptying and cleaning a trash can that has an accumulation of decaying organic matter. In the worst case scenario, phorid flies can be breeding around an area where a drain pipe has cracked and is leaking below the slab. The flies breed there then enter the house through cracks in the slab. In this case the leak will have to be fixed in order to stop the problem.

Some examples of the types of places where phorid flies might breed are listed below, but keep in mind that this is not a complete list: **Think decaying organic matter.**

- rotten fruit or vegetables that have been misplaced or forgotten
- in the bottoms of trash cans that need to be cleaned
- in and around pets, or moist pet food
- in sink drains (this is a common site, the larvae breed in the scum that accumulates on the inside of the drain pipes. Physically cleaning the drain and then regularly cleaning the pipes with approved microbial drain cleaners (such as DrainGel, BioMop, or Vector Bio-5) will eliminate this problem.
- Dirt and decaying organic matter that accumulates under stoves, refrigerators, etc, especially if there is a leak that causes this organic matter to remain moist (Some of the microbial cleaners are useful in managing this situation as well)
- Leaks under air conditioners, ie in drip pans of Acs or refrigerators
- Leaky wax seals around toilets.
- Leaks due to broken pipes underneath the house
- Accumulations of organic matter in potted plants or their drip pans. (avoiding over watering will help with this problem).
- In garbage disposals
- In animal carcasses, such as dead birds, small rodents, frogs, lizards, etc.
- In or under liners of pet/bird cages
- In vases containing old plants or plant material
- **Any other place there is an accumulation of moist organic matter.**

Keep in mind that there may be more than one location. Don't stop looking just because you found one potential site. Once they get into a house, phorid flies are very good at finding all available breeding sites.

As far as insecticide treatments, any aerosol spray that is labeled for indoor use to control flying insects will knock down the adults that it contacts. The problem is that unless the breeding source, or sources, is found and eliminated they will be back the next day.

This information is for educational and preliminary planning purposes only. Brand names mentioned in this publication are used as examples only. No endorsement of these products is intended. Other appropriately labeled products containing similar active ingredients should provide similar levels of control. Always read and follow the insecticide label.