

SPIDER MITE

By Sue Hakala

These mites are tiny, and hard to see with the naked eye. To confirm their presence, hold a sheet of white paper under a leaf and rap the stem several times. Any mites will fall on the paper and move around. In heavy infestations, they form dense clusters and spin fine webs on the undersides of leaves. They like hot, dry environments, and prey on water-stressed plants sucking out plant juices. Spider mites aren't picky, liking all plants, but especially fruit trees, cucurbits, tomatoes, roses, houseplants, and your most prized plant. In addition to the bugs and webs, watch for stippled leaves with yellow fading to a bronze color. Severely infested plants can die.

There are many generations in a year. In a warm climate like ours, reproduction goes on nonstop all year. Spider mites can over winter as adults or as eggs on host plants.

Mist plants to create an unfavorable environment. Blast spider mites off with a strong stream of water to dislodge them from your plants. Soapy water applied every 7 – 10 days will help. Remember to get it on the undersides of leaves. Keep in mind though, that this will kill off many of them, but the strongest Amazonian ones will still be clinging to your plant. You must be diligent about blasting them repeatedly. Spider mites are resistant to most pesticides. Using pesticides most likely will kill their natural enemies, lacewings among others. Then spider mites will increase uninterrupted thanks to their short life cycle. Plant small-flowered nectar plants like alyssum and dill to attract natural enemies.