

Aphids

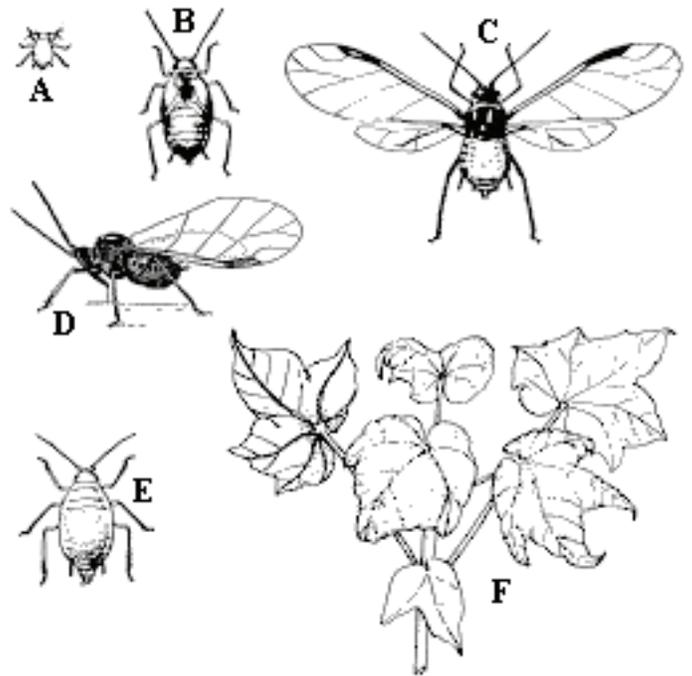
How to identify damage: Aphids feed in clusters on any part of a plant, but especially on tender, young growth. New shoots that appear deformed, stunted, and discolored may harbor a colony of aphids. Additionally, the insect excretes a sticky substance called honeydew that will coat objects beneath the colony and in turn produce a black, sooty mold covering the plant, furniture, and cars.

Life cycle: The aphid family has the high reproductive potential of all insects. Aphids over-winter on bark and needles as black oval eggs. The eggs hatch in the spring at the same time as plant buds begin to uncurl. The newly hatched aphids will begin to feed immediately, and very soon produce live progeny, some species up to 200 young in each generation. Asexual reproduction continues all summer with up to 17 generations being produced. In the fall, many of the species produce a final generation of males and females, which produce the over-wintering eggs.

Critical control time: Fortunately, aphids are hosts to a thriving community of predators and parasites. A variety of minute wasps and other insects, such as ladybug beetles, quickly reduce the numbers of an aphid infestation. However, if you feel the damage is excessive or aesthetically unpleasing, then take action as early as possible before the numbers increase and the sooty mold does damage. Look for stunted, curled new growth.

Control strategies: Aphids are frequently controlled by natural predators, so intervention by a homeowner is often not required if he or she is patient. However, if the damage or sooty mold is becoming unacceptable, spraying with either horticultural oil or insecticidal soap will quickly control the infestation. Since aphids reproduce so quickly, you should then monitor your plant for the remainder of the season for re-infestations.

Aphid damage can range from leaf distortion to bud and leaf loss, and can eventually kill a plant if left untreated.



Cotton aphid. A-B, Nymphs. C-E, Adults. F, Damage.

