

Spider Mites

By Deborah Birge, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

Q: What are spider mites?

Spider mites love our hot, humid summers and are the most common pest complaint this time of year. The mites, which are actually arachnids, multiply rapidly on the shaded underneath of leaves and are so small you don't notice them until you see leaf damage. Mites feed on the cells of leaves causing a puckered, mottled appearance, silvering or bronzing of the leaf. Leaves will eventually fall off.

If you have a handheld magnifying glass you will see small, red, spider-like critters with eight legs. If you see white bodies, you are not seeing white flies but the cast-off skins of the mites. You may see some webbing but not always.

What to Do?

1. Healthy plants are less likely to attract pests. Spider mites are attracted to water stressed plants.
2. Look for beneficial insects such as lady beetles, are they doing their job?
3. If possible, isolate the plant.
4. Wash the plant with a strong stream of water to remove the mites. Be sure to focus under the leaves and wash several times per week.
5. A spray of neem or a light, summer oil will smother the adults and eggs.
6. Avoid using pesticides since many spider mites are resistant to these sprays. Additionally, you can make your situation worse by killing beneficial insects working to decrease the population.



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For more information, see <https://texasinsects.tamu.edu/spider-mite/>