Slow down!
Spider Mites are really small and Ubiquitous!

Spider mites are spiders, not insects. They have 8 legs where insects have only 6. Regardless, they are a serious pest both indoors and out. Spider mites are very small, only about 1/50 of an inch long and, thus, are difficult to see. They have piercing-sucking mouth parts for feeding on plant sap. They can multiply rapidly and in large numbers causing leaves to take on a dusty, dull appearance. Leaves then turn yellow and drop or turn brown or tan.

Examples

Underside leaf infection

Fast eating "two spotted" mites

Web-spinning mites

We have several different species of spider mites in Oklahoma. Some are reddish in color, but others are brownish or pale greenish. Some have two or more darker spots on the back. Several common species spin fine, irregular webs over the infested parts of plants but other species spin little or no webbing.

Spider mites live in colonies, mostly on the undersurfaces of leaves. A single colony may contain hundreds of individuals. The name "spider mite" and "web-spinning mite" come from the silk webbing most species produce on infested leaves. The presence of webbing is an easy way to distinguish them from all other types of mites and small insects such as aphids and thrips (which can also infest the undersides of leaves).

Spider mites reproduce rapidly in hot weather and commonly become numerous from June through September. Seems the hotter it is, the better they like it. If the temperature and food supplies are favorable, a generation can be completed in less than a week.

Damage occurs when the mites suck plant juices with their small, needle-like mouthparts. Light infestations leave a pattern of small, pale spots on the infested plant. Heavier infestations will cause the individual spots to run together and can cause the death of a leaf or needle. This type of damage is often the only sign of an infestation in a species which do not spin webs.

Loss of leaves won't cause yield losses in fruit trees during the year of infestation unless it occurs in spring or very early summer, but it may impact next year's crop. On annual vegetable crops (e.g. squash, melons, watermelons) loss of leaves can have a significant impact on yield and lead to sunburning. On crops such as sugar peas and beans where pods are attacked, spider mites can cause direct damage.

Dusty conditions often lead to mite outbreaks. Apply water to pathways and other dusty areas at regular intervals. Water-stressed trees and plants are less tolerant of spider mite damage. Be sure to provide adequate irrigation. Midseason washing of trees and vines with water to remove dust may help prevent serious late-season mite infestations.

Highly refined oils sold as superior or horticultural oils are also very effective in controlling mites. The oil suffocates the mites. Unlike dormant oils, these oils are highly refined and, under proper conditions, can be applied to plants in foliage without damage. Superior oils are also considered nontoxic and are less harmful to beneficial insects. Follow label directions to avoid damage to some plants that may be sensitive.

When spraying indoors, protect surfaces that may be damaged by an oil residue. Always read the label and follow the instructions.

The best defense is a good offence against spider mites. Keep plants healthy as follows:

- Most plants should receive about one inch of water per week to avoid stress conditions.
- Conserve moisture through proper mulching.
- Select drought-tolerant plants for locations that are particularly hot and dry.
- Do not fertilize plants during drought, as this can add further stress to plants.
- Do not overwater as this can lead to root rot.

Sources:

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