

Pest Identification - Alliums



APHIDS (GENERAL)

Aphids are small, soft-bodied pear-shaped insects less than a tenth of an inch long. They may be beige, green, yellow or almost black and tend to congregate in groups on new growth or in leaf crevices. They can cause stunted growth and mottled or yellowing leaves, and can spread plant diseases.

Prevention and control:

Check plants often for early outbreaks. Clip off and compost leaves holding aphid clusters. In small outbreaks, a high-pressure spray from a garden hose can help to blast the aphids off. Plant flowers to attract aphid predators – lady beetles and their larvae are great predators, while syrphid flies and lacewings will also feed on aphids.



SLUGS & SNAILS

Slugs and snails move about on moist leaves, mulch and soil. Species can be as small as a pea or as big as your thumb. Slugs and snails chew holes with smooth edges into leaves, and small seedlings can be entirely eaten up. Feeding is most common at night or in rainy weather. Look out for a glistening trail of slime on stems or leaves that have been visited by slugs or snails.

Prevention and control:

Natural predators include frogs, toads, snakes, turtles, ground beetles, firefly larvae and many birds. Slugs and snails get an electric shock when they cross a copper barrier, so use copper tape around planters or raised beds to deter them. Slugs can be lured into pit traps made by placing an inch of beer into small open containers sunk into soil up to their rim. You can also hand pick slugs then drown them in a pail of soapy water.



ONION ROOT MAGGOT

Onion flies are small hump-backed flies that emerge in late spring, just as onions begin to grow vigorously. They lay eggs at the base of onions, and the larvae that hatch tunnel into the onion's roots. When young onion plants wilt for no apparent reason, pull one up to check for the maggots. A damaged plant will often break off as you pull it from the ground.

Prevention and control:

Row covers prevent egg laying by adults. Install them early on, before the flies take wing. At the end of each season, pull up every last onion from the garden. Dig and move perennial onions every fall. If onion root maggots appear, remove damaged plants before they move on to healthy ones. Beneficial nematodes are the only effective treatment for this pest.



CUTWORM

Cutworms are blackish-gray to brown smooth-skinned caterpillars that hide in the soil by day and feed at night. The larvae feed on the roots and foliage of seedlings, often girdling them at the soil line and causing the top of the plant to shrivel and die. In summer, cutworms can crawl up plants and chew holes in the leaves that look like slug damage.

Prevention and control:

Include plenty of perches in your garden to attract insect-eating birds. Frequent shallow cultivation can expose and kill cutworms. As soon as you suspect cutworm damage, use a fork and flashlight to find the culprits at night. Check hourly and catch them as they emerge. You can trap the adult moths with solar landscape lights set above broad pails of soapy water.



THRIPS

Thrips are tiny sucking insects that look like miniature lobsters when viewed through a magnifying glass. On plants they look like tiny dark slivers. Feeding thrips cause white patches or streaks on plants. More seriously they can transmit plant viruses.

Prevention and control:

Thrips have numerous natural enemies that are attracted by planting lots of flowers. Avoid over-fertilizing, which increases the risk of damage from thrips. Use yellow or blue sticky traps to monitor populations of thrips, especially under cover. Manage outbreaks by removing and destroying badly infested plants.



ALLIUM LEAF MINER

Meandering light trails in leaves are the eating paths left by leaf miners, which are the larvae of small black flies. Damage is usually only cosmetic, though in severe cases plants can be weakened.

Prevention and control:

Use row covers if you often see leaf miner damage. The covers will also help to protect against onion root maggots. Yellow sticky traps placed near plants can capture many adults before they lay their eggs on plants. If leaf miner damage does occur, pinch off, smash and compost badly damaged leaves. Many tiny wasps are leaf miner predators.

Report any bugs you've seen in your garden to: BigBugHunt.com

