

Rosemania Recommends:

Knocking Out Those Spider Mites

By: Logan Shillinglaw

The heat of summer is upon us! As Robbie mentioned last month, this is a chance to get your roses ready for the beauty of the fall. In addition to the regular watering, feeding and disease prevention, you need to be aware of the pesky spider mite.

This time of year I get quite a few E-mail letters where the comments and questions are the same - "I am watering and spraying my roses on a regular basis, but the bottom leaves start to lose their color and fall off. What am I doing wrong?" People also write that they are using an insecticide and they can't see insects on their roses. Not to worry, you don't have some rare disease causing your leaves to fall off. These are all common symptoms of a spider mite infestation.

I'll never forget the first time I had spider mites. It was many years ago in mid-July and although my roses received regular and deep watering, they looked thirsty. The bottom leaves had lost their lush green color and I didn't have a clue as to the cause. Robbie came over and enlightened me to the world of spider mites. These little critters had taken up residence on the underside of my leaves and were sucking the juices out of my leaves. As they finished the lowest leaves they would move up the plant having a feast and, more importantly, laying eggs along the way. Upon close inspection (my eyes were much younger and better then) I could see the mites moving along the tiny webs they have made under the leaves.

"What's the story with these mites", I asked. It's really pretty simple. They hatch from eggs and during the cooler weather their reproductive cycle is quite long. This combined with natural predators, means that in the Spring and Fall, spider mites rarely gain a presence. However, as the weather warms during the summer, the spider mite can lay eggs and reproduce in 3-4 days. This is how they are able to sneak up on your garden and have a powerful effect in such a short time.

"If I can't see them, how can I know if I have them before it gets bad?" During hot weather, it is good to periodically check under the

leaves of your roses. If you detect a grainy feel, you may have spider mites on your roses. If you see webs, you've got a bunch of them. If you wait too long, you'll notice the loss of leaves.

"How do I get rid of spider mites?" There are really two approaches and I have used them both. The first method is to remove them mechanically. Attach a spray nozzle to your water wand to produce a concentrated blast of water. Blast the underside of your rose leaves. Don't worry, your roses can handle this. They will actually enjoy the cool water. This will knock the mites and eggs off the leaves and disrupt the reproductive cycle. I recommend doing this every other day for a week and it should keep them from taking hold.

In the case of my first spider mite experience, I chose the second method - a miticide. Don't be confused by thinking that your insecticide will help with mites. Spider mites are not part of the insect family and will not be harmed by an insecticide. **You need to use a miticide!** A miticide kills the living mites but does not kill the mite eggs. Therefore, you need to make multiple applications of your miticide. This will kill the reproducing mites in the first spray and newly hatched mites in subsequent applications. If you have a small garden (20 plants or less) and a small budget, you may want to try *Isotox*. I have a large rose garden so at the time *Avid* was the best product for my situation. Apply to the underside of the leaves and then repeat in three days to get the newly hatched mites before they can produce more eggs. Keep in mind that the damaged leaves will not recover but your other leaves will be spared. Don't get too over confident, because as the hot summer progresses, the mites may return. If so, apply your miticide of choice as directed on the label, but do not spray miticides preventatively as mites can easily build up resistance due to overuse.

Since my first experience with mites, a new product has come on the market that has been a real time and rose saver for me. This new product is called *Floramite SC* and it is by far the best miticide currently on the market. *Floramite SC* is a combination of a miticide (kills living mites) and an ovicide (kills mite eggs). It is also easy on beneficial insects so you can maintain a good balance in your garden. The label states to not use it more than once every 21 days and in my garden I have never had to use it more than twice a year. Normally, one spraying and it knocks out the

mites!! (For those of you already using *Avid*, you can pick up the benefit of an ovicide by adding *Hexygon* to your mite program).

Mites are a real hassle and can defoliate your roses. If you pay attention and learn how your garden reacts to various conditions, you can minimize the damage caused by those pesky mites. Act quickly with whichever method works best for you. Your roses will reward you with health and vigor throughout the summer and into the fall.

SOIL REMINDER!! Now is a great time to test your soil - especially if you did not do so in the early Spring. By ensuring that your pH is at the correct level, (6.0 - 6.5), your roses will be better able to take up nutrients and produce the high quality blooms we are all looking for in our gardens. Your local agricultural extension office is one source for soil testing. I have switched to using a pH soil test meter and do my own tests. This way I know right away and can quickly make any amendments to my soil. The Kelway HB-2 meter I use is a great meter and has easily paid for itself.

Now go out and enjoy your garden - keep using sunscreen and drinking fluids!



Logan Shillinglaw is a past President of the Nashville Rose Society as well as a Consulting Rosarian. He wrote the Beginners Column in the *American Rose* magazine in 2001. He is Co-Owner of *Rosemania* and enjoys giving presentations to local groups on the ease of growing beautiful roses. He and his wife Joan are accomplished exhibitors and balance their time between work, their two children and tending to their 125+ roses. Feel free to contact him by e-mail at questions@rosemania.com.