

Spider Mites

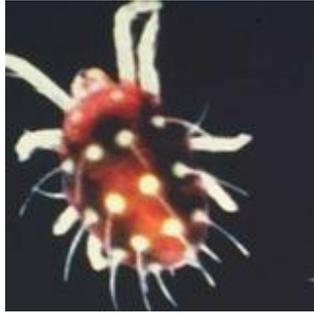
Introduction

Spider mites are the bane of the Orchid grower. To successfully deal with these bugs one must use a three pronged approach encompassing prevention, treatment and environmental changes.

What is a Spider Mite

Red spider mites are just visible to the human eye and should be easily identified with a five power hand lens. They look like little red spiders and if you look closely you should be able to see some eggs that look like microscopic pearls. They also spin a web that looks like debris. The mites, eggs and webs will all be found on the underside of the leaf. If the mites are small, translucent and appear to have two spots on their back then you have two spotted mites. One sure fire way to detect mites is to take a facial tissue or a soft white cloth and wipe the underside of the leaves. If after wiping your tissue comes away red or rust coloured, you have mites.





Red Spider Mite



Two Spotted Mite

Prevention

Mites are a problem twice a year, summer and winter. Mites appear in summer when it is hot and dry in the growing area. Mites also thrive when heating systems are pumping out hot dry heat in the winter.

One way to prevent mites from taking hold is to mist the underside of leaves. Raising the humidity in the growing area can work in the winter but may not help in the summer because all the windows are usually open to help bring the temperature down inside the growing area.

Treatment

If you catch the problem early enough a blast of water on the underside of the leaves will usually do it. But if you find plenty of the little suckers and maybe a web or two you are in trouble.

Safer brand miticide and other insecticidal soaps will kill the mites on contact but do nothing to the eggs. This treatment must be repeated every five to seven days for at least three treatments. Caution when using pesticides on mites, they will build a resistance to this.

Predator Mites

In a balance environment mites have enemies. Predator mites and ladybugs can eat three mites or twenty eggs a day with no damage to the host plant. Purchasing these predators is easy as calling your local nursery. If they do not sell them they will know who does. Effective treatment is dependent on choosing the right predator. The most important parameters are temperature and humidity. You want to keep the predators alive long enough to do the job.

Conclusion

Pesticide spraying is not the answer, it is a short term solution. To gain control of a persistent problem, you must bring your local environment into balance, which means humidity has to go up and spraying will have to stop. Give the predators a try.