

Red Spider Mites

by Stanley Rachesky

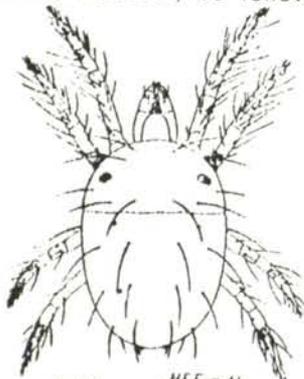
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Description — Several species of mites that feed on the foliage of trees, shrubs, flowers, and vegetables are commonly called red spider mites, spruce spider mites, two-spotted spider mites, or European red mites. They are small, active creatures that look like specks running about on the undersides of the leaves or on the fine webbing spun by them. In spite of their small size, they can easily be seen when the infestation becomes heavy. The mites vary from almost no color at all to pale yellow. They may or may not have dark spots — orange, green, or almost black — depending on their size, stage of development, and the host plant. The first stage that hatches from the egg has six legs, but after the first molt both the immature and adult mites have eight legs. The almost spherical eggs are lightly cemented to the foliage of the plants. They hatch in five to ten days, depending on temperatures. In warm weather, a generation may be completed in ten or twelve days.

Damage — In feeding, the mites rasp and pierce the foliage to withdraw the plant juices and chlorophyll. The damaged foliage at first appears finely mottled and then grayish, dry, and brown. The leaves of deciduous plants fall prematurely, while the foliage or branches of evergreens die. The damage is not due to the voracious feeding of a few mites, but to the feeding of a tremendous population which builds up quickly.

Detection — Plants that are likely to be attacked by mites should be inspected frequently, beginning in May, to detect and control the infestation before damage occurs. A convenient way to detect an infestation is to strike a few branches of the plant sharply with one hand while holding a white dish or piece of paper under the branches with the other hand. If mites are present, they can be seen running about on the paper or dish when it is held in bright light.

Control — Mites can be kept under control by syringing the plants frequently with a strong stream of water. It is not enough merely to sprinkle them, because a forceful stream of water is required to dislodge both mites and eggs. More dependable control can, however, be obtained by spraying, and fortunately several excellent miticides are available. Among those that can be recommended are dicofol (Kelthane) or malathion, Aramite 15-W, Chlorobenzilate 25-W. These materials have good initial killing properties, and the spray residues are effective against mites for several weeks. None of the materials are hazardous to use. Directions of the respective manufacturers should, however, be followed.



Spider mite



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