

Healthy Home and Garden Tips

The Battle with Aphids

Armed with an arsenal of eco-friendly supplies, I head to my garden to do battle with the aphids that have taken up residence on my roses. Hundreds of these small, soft-bodied, pear-shaped insects cover the back of leaves and the base of stems. If that's not bad enough, another garden insect has joined the party – ants! Aphids and ants enjoy a mutualistic relationship. Aphids drink the sweet sap found inside the plants. As they feed, the insects secrete a waste product called honeydew. This sugar-rich substance is a favorite food of ants, who are known to use their long antennae to stimulate its release. In return, the ants protect the aphids from predatory insects like ladybugs and lacewings. A win-win for this dynamic duo but not for my roses. Left untreated, the infestation can cause yellow and distorted leaves, stunted growth, low yields and in some cases plant death. Fortunately, there are many ways to effectively control this garden pest while maintaining the health of the environment.



Homemade Insect Soap Spray

Materials:

- Warm water
- Liquid soap (pure castile soap is best; avoid soaps containing bleach or degreaser additives)
- Quart-sized spray bottle

Directions:

- Combine 1 tablespoon liquid soap in 4 cups of warm water in a spray bottle and shake.
- Apply in the evening directly on aphids. Turnover and peel open curled up leaves to get hard to reach bugs.

Natural Aphid Control

Use these tips to control aphids without the use of harsh chemicals.

1. Remove aphids manually. Scrape them off with a stick or blast them with water. This will also remove some of the honeydew.
2. Use natural or slow release fertilizers instead of aphid-attracting synthetic fertilizers high in nitrogen.
3. Spray aphids with soapy water or neem oil to kill them.
4. Cover susceptible plants with row covers in mid-summer to prevent aphids from visiting.
5. Attract natural predators like ladybugs and lacewings to your garden by planting mint, fennel, dill, thyme and parsley.
6. Grow plants like aster, mum, and cosmos that attract aphids. Growing these far from other garden plants will lure aphids away and keep the garden aphid-free.

Join a Metro natural gardening educator to learn how to: Control aphids in your garden

[youtube.com/user/OregonMetroGov](https://www.youtube.com/user/OregonMetroGov)

Common household ants

Ever notice what appears to be a few harmless ants wandering aimlessly around your kitchen? Don't be fooled! Antennae to the ground, these resourceful little creatures are scouting for sweet treats, meats and other uncovered food items. Once discovered, the ants will scurry back home to announce their find. Before long, a conga line of ants will be marching across your countertop to gather food for their friends back home.

Who are these household pests? There are two common types of nuisance ants - odorous house ants (*Tapinoma sessile*) and pavement ants (*Tetramorium* spp.) These tiny black and brown insects are often referred to as sugar ants. As predators, scavengers and soil builders, both ant species play an important role in maintaining ecosystem health. Although these ants prefer to live outdoors under logs and stones, they will move indoors to find food and water. Inside the home, they pose a health risk by contaminating food. Pavement ants are also known to sting.

Top tip to keep ants out of your home

Eliminating food and water sources is the single most important step in preventing indoor ant problems.



Kill ants naturally

- Combine 1 cup white vinegar with 1 cup water in a spray bottle. Saturate ants with solution to kill them within about an hour.
- Remove dead ants with a wet sponge. Clean hard surfaces, including floors and countertops with solution to disrupt the chemical marker left behind by ants.
- Repeat application two or three times a week until the parade of ants stops permanently.

Dealing with nuisance ants

1. Wash food residue off all surfaces with a soapy rag and make sure food is sealed in containers with tight lids.
2. Wipe up ants with a soapy rag. Soap kills ants and also washes away the chemical markers they leave behind to guide other ants on the trail.
3. Vacuum up heavy infestations and then remove the vacuum bag, seal it tightly in plastic and dispose of it in the trash.
4. Use bait stations if problems persist. Look for bait stations that contain tetraborate or boric acid as the only active ingredients. Be careful to place bait stations out of reach of children and pets.

Keeping ants out of your home

1. Where possible, remove any piles of wood or decaying stumps near your home's foundation so there are fewer places for ants to colonize.
2. Clean gutters and seal any leaks in siding, roof and plumbing.
3. Cut back tree branches or shrubs that touch the walls or roof of your house so ants can't use them as a bridge.
4. Use a silicone-based or other non-toxic sealant to seal gaps between baseboards and floors, window frames and walls, and where under-counter plumbing enters the wall.

Ask Metro

Learn more:

<https://katu.com/archive/how-to-get-rid-of-ants---naturally>

<https://www.oregonmetro.gov/tools-living/yard-and-garden/garden-problems/aphids>