



Causes and Control of Sooty Mold

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Insects that cause sooty mold

1. Aphids
2. Mealybugs
3. Soft Scales
4. Thorn bugs
5. Whiteflies

Whiteflies, aphids, mealybugs, thorn bugs and soft scales are insect groups that suck sap from plants. Some of this sap passes through the bodies of sucking insects and excreted, at which point it is known as 'honeydew'. At times, honeydew accumulates in the area of feeding and often drops onto lower leaves and stems. A black fungus, commonly called 'sooty mold', colonizes the



Sooty mold on citrus leaves

honeydew. In small quantities, the sooty mold does very little harm to the plant but is unattractive. In large amounts, sooty mold can interfere with photosynthesis which could slow plant growth.

The key to controlling sooty mold is to control the insects that cause honeydew to coat plants. Sap sucking insects can be controlled with a variety of insecticides. However, the least toxic control of these insects involves the applications of horticultural mineral (insecticidal) oils or soaps.

Horticultural mineral oils will do a good job on small soft scales and whiteflies, but not on mealybugs and aphids. To control soft scales and whiteflies with insecticidal oils, spray all surfaces of the leaves and twigs of the plant. Sprays should not be applied during extreme hot or windy weather. In the summer, apply the spray during early morning hours or in the evening. Once the insects are under control, sooty mold will eventually wash away in heavy rains. Ultra fine oil spray is also used to loosen sooty mold from plants but several applications will be necessary. Other insecticides are also available for scales and whiteflies control.



Sooty mold on Ixora coccinea

To control mealybugs, aphids and thorn bugs, use a horticultural soap spray or products containing bifenthrin or cyfluthrin. You can also consider using a root absorbed systemic insecticide that contains imidacloprid. Imidacloprid is not to be used on any edible plants such as citrus, tomatoes or herbs.

Tips for 'de-caking' plants of sooty mold

1. Apply several applications of insecticidal oil sprays to the entire plant.
2. Be patient, rain and beneficial insects will do the job naturally, eventually!