Mealybugs only seem invincible

Mealybugs are one of the most unbreakable, and consequently the most stressing, greenhouse pests. This unique insect has proven to be quite adaptable, capable of surviving in a wide range of environments, and able to thrive in conditions that would normally kill other insects. This makes them a challenge for gardeners and plant producers, as they can be difficult to control and require a multi-pronged approach to manage.

Despite their resilience, there are effective strategies to combat mealybugs. It’s important to identify the type of mealybug you’re dealing with, as different species have varying susceptibilities to control methods. Here’s a guide to help you manage mealybugs effectively.

First, identify what kind of mealybugs are present. Citrus and longtailed mealybugs are the most common. Citrus have short waxy rods of roughly similar length around their bodies, while longtailed mealybugs have two sets of longish white ‘tails’ extending from behind, but produce no egg masses.

Next, identify mealybug stages. The immature (larval) stage of mealybugs is less active during short winter days in the north. By the time mealybug numbers are high and conditions are warm and humid (64°F to 91°F, RH 70%+), they reproduce only on mealybugs having egg masses (i.e. not longtailed). This is a crucial period for controlling mealybugs before they become more dormant and difficult to manage.

Lacewings are predators of mealybug eggs and nymphs. Releases of the lacewings eggs or lacewing larvae can be made almost any time and can be concentrated where needed. Lightly mist foliage before scattering the eggs to help them adhere. Lacewings are often used in conjunction with other control methods.

Especially where infestations are high, and replicated trials provide helpful guidelines, but some inconsistent outcomes inherent with mealybug studies seem to occur. Despite variable results, insecticides are still valuable for mealybug management. Consider pyrethroids (Discus N/G includes Sclar. Work in Maryland showed hot (120 degrees F) F can kill mealybugs, according to work by Dr. Casey Root, hibiscus, solenopsis, papaya, obscure, and several others are known. Dr. Lance Osborne’s University of Florida website (http://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/lso/mealybugs.htm) offers a control strategy including use of biological controls.

For best results, get your mealybugs identified, then combine sanitation with beneficials or other controls. Isolating infested material – insecticides weren’t going to work well for these anyway. Arboreta sometimes ‘fallow’ or power-washing benches between crops and not planting in recently used pots. ‘Spot’ infestations were eliminated by discarding the most infested plants – insecticides couldn’t make it inside a mealybug’s hiding place.

In lighter cases, systemic chemical sprays may be needed. In more severe situations, where mealybugs tend to be troublesome, systemic applications can be considered. Soil-applied systemics include Kontos, Flagship, Safari, and Marathon/Discus N/G (or generic). Foliar applications contain soap, pyrethroids, and other products. Products such as Triact 70, TriStar, Enstar II, and Marathon/Discus N/G (or generic) may be used at the full rate for systemic control, and will be less active during short winter days in the north.

Systemic work is the most important part of a control strategy including use of biological controls. The use of beneficials has proven to be effective in managing mealybugs. The biological method is the most important part of a control strategy, and can be used in conjunction with other control methods. Beneficials such as lacewings, ladybugs, and other predators can be used in combination with other control methods.

Insecticide resistance is a problem for mealybug control. Mealybug resistance to insecticides is a growing concern in the greenhouse industry. There are some insecticides that are more resistant to mealybug control, such as pyrethroids. The use of beneficials has proven to be effective in managing mealybugs. The biological method is the most important part of a control strategy, and can be used in conjunction with other control methods.

Cryptolaemus looks very much like a mealybug, so be sure not to confuse the two. The differences will be apparent on close inspection. Cryptolaemus is a predator of mealybugs, creating a natural control method. Cryptolaemus is a predator of mealybugs, creating a natural control method.

In conclusion, mealybugs are a challenging pest to manage. A comprehensive, multipronged attack is necessary to manage mealybugs effectively. By understanding mealybug behavior and biology, you can develop a strategic plan to manage mealybugs and keep your greenhouse healthy.

Conclusion

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