



The Itsy-Bitsy, Nasty Spider Mite

Buggy Bits this issue is an article that first appeared in the Jan/Feb 2000 issue of "Gardening HOW-TO" Magazine. It is used here with permission from the magazine. Even though the reference is to winter care of house plants, the information is valid for summers, as well, here in Oregon.

Winter can be a treacherous time for houseplants. Humidity is low and houses are warm, plus many gardeners are too busy to notice subtle signs of danger on their plants. For example, take spider mites - nearly microscopic pests (1/50 of an inch) that feed on plant juices. Because mites are so small, it's easy to overlook them. They do leave their mark on plants though - usually tiny webbing, or a stippling or mottling effect like a coating of dust.

Because spider mites reproduce quickly (a new generation grows in under a week in dry, warm settings), it's tough to get rid of them. Fight them by raising the humidity around your plants. One simple help is to set your plants on water filled trays of pebbles. The bottom of the pot should sit on the pebbles, but above the water line. As the water evaporates, it adds moisture to the air around the plant.

Spider mites also love dry plants with dusty leaves, so washing plants repeatedly is also helpful. Give them a regular shower with a forceful spray of lukewarm or room temperature water. Not only will you help wash off mites, but you'll clean dust from the leaves. (Dust decreases the amount of light that your plant gets - just as light is dimmer when it shines through a dirty window.) Also, whenever you buy a plant, check it for webbing. Mites love to piggyback on nursery plants.

If you need stronger action, try spraying plants with insecticidal soap, which is widely available at garden centers. Be sure to follow label directions

