

Head off houseplant pests with vigilance, cleanliness

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CORVALLIS – Insects lurking under leaves, climbing up stems and settling into the soil of houseplants frustrate indoor gardeners to no end.

But there are answers, according to experts with Oregon State University’s Extension Service.

Winter is a good time to check indoor plants for sap-sucking insects like mites, thrips, mealybugs, scales, whiteflies and aphids. Spotting problems and responding to them early can keep populations from exploding.

There are a number of strategies to keep your indoor pests at bay without resorting to chemical controls.

First of all, learn your houseplants’ needs and keep them healthy with the correct amount of light, water and nutrition. Stressed plants encourage problems. For example, hot, dry and dusty conditions promote mite outbreaks and feeding plants too much high-nitrogen fertilizer makes for a delicious dinner for aphids.

When you spot some insects, it’s necessary to identify the pest before treating since different insects require different treatments. If you don’t know, put a few infested leaves in a plastic bag and go to your nearest Extension office or take a photo and submit it to Ask an Expert, an online Extension question-and-answer feature.

Once you determine that you’ve got a problem, isolate infested plants from others so the insects don’t spread from plant to plant.

If whiteflies are present, you can carefully vacuum them off with a hand-held vacuum, dislodge them with

a soft spray of water or wipe leaves with a sponge. If you go the vacuum route, freeze the bag to kill the contents.

Another trick is to place aluminum foil around the base of a plant. This may disorient winged pests like thrips and aphids and discourage them from landing. Or paint a small dish yellow and fill it with water to attract and drown them.

Use yellow sticky traps, available at garden centers, to capture aphids and whiteflies. Blue sticky traps are good for snaring adult thrips while white ones work best for adult fungus gnats. Kill fungus gnat larvae that live in the soil by reducing the amount of water you give plants; they love moisture. Also, remove standing water in the saucer.

Swabbing bug-ridden leaves with a small paintbrush dipped in rubbing alcohol will destroy soft-bodied aphids and mealybugs. This works best when infestations have just gotten started.

Some pests can be easily eliminated by shaking them onto a sheet of paper and discarding; or by hand if you are not too squeamish. Pinch off heavily infested leaves or other plant parts and destroy.

Spray plants plagued by soft-bodied pests with gentle insecticidal soaps or light horticultural oils available at garden centers. These may hurt some plants, so spot treat one leaf first. Also, soaps and oils are not as effective on winged adults, because they fly off and come back later.

You may want to consider throwing out heavily infested plants. Discard soil and clean the pot or container as well.

If you feel you have to resort to chemical pesticides, keep in mind that few pesticides are registered or considered safe for indoor use on houseplants. Read labels



PHOTO BY STEPHEN WARD

Keeping houseplants healthy is one strategy to avoid pests, but there are effective control methods for infestations.

carefully for where and how to use a pesticide. If indoor use is not listed on the label, take the plant to be treated

outside, away from children and pet traffic areas. Leave the plant outside a day or two after spraying.

Apply now for master gardener training

Applications for the OSU Master Gardener Program in Central Oregon are now available. The program targets individuals interested in becoming a trained volunteer who wants to learn and share research-based gardening information.

The program starts with 10 classes that meet on Fridays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., January 19 through April 6, at the OSU Cascades campus in Bend. It continues with hands-on training through September.

Applications must be received by January 9. Cost is \$295 and includes tuition, text book and supplies. Partial scholarships are available.

More information is available at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes>.

Woman’s estate files lawsuit over killing

PORTLAND (AP) — The estate of a woman has filed a \$3.6 million lawsuit against Backpage.com and the owners of the Portland hotel where she was killed by a man she had met for sex.

According to the lawsuit filed Friday, 25-year-old Ashley Benson had been trafficked by an abusive pimp.

The lawsuit says she was killed in 2014 by 27-year-old Tae Bum Yoon who found her through Backpage and lured her to the DoubleTree by

Hilton hotel in Portland.

The Oregonian / OregonLive reports Yoon was sentenced to 18 years in prison after he was found guilty of first-degree manslaughter.

The lawsuit claims Backpage.com and the hotel failed to establish and use practices to protect victims of sex trafficking like Benson.

Representatives for Hilton and Backpage didn’t immediately return requests for comment.

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