Aphid Control in Vegetable Gardens

Vegetable gardens can be overrun with aphids. The soil may be tilled, plants that repel them may be introduced, neem and soap spray may be used, and the aphids sprayed off the plants with water, yet they can always get the upper hand. Even tenting plants with netting and releasing beneficial insects like ladybugs or katydids can help. What other methods may fight off these nasty pests?

- Putting a reflective mulch such as foil paper on top of the soil below the plants can slow aphid infestation.
- In early spring or early fall, when it is not blistering hot, put a fine mesh screen or fabric over the garden. The plants will still need to be monitored regularly, preferably daily, and the barriers will need to be removed. It's not recommended to leave barriers in place during the hot summer months because the temperature inside the barrier is warmer than outside, so it can cause the plants to suffer heat stress
- High-pressure water sprays can dislodge aphids. This treatment will need to be repeated frequently.
- Use pesticides, neem oil, and insecticidal soaps only as a last resort because these products will also kill the beneficial insects that naturally control aphids.

Green peach aphid (Myzus persicae), Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org

Other cultural practices to consider include:

- Remove any plant debris and dispose of weeds or other unwanted plants that pop up to get rid of the food and shelter before planting and throughout the growing season. When the growing season ends, remove these during Fall cleanup so aphids will not overwinter there. Also, control of aphids is easiest soon after they hatch from the eggs. Look for egg clusters or tight groups of eggs on the undersides of the leaves. The eggs can be gently scraped away or removed with a blast of water.
  https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/guides/texas-vegetable-growers-handbook/chapter-vi-insect-management/
  https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2011/03/aphids.pdf

Some other things may be contributing to the aphid issue:

- Are there other plants nearby in the yard or a neighbor's that may attract aphids to the vegetable garden? For example, the Cotton or Melon Aphid (*Aphis gossypii*) food sources include begonia, catalpa, citrus, ground ivy, hydrangea, violets, weeds, and vegetables. Green Peach Aphid (*Myzus persicae*) has many food sources, including peaches, some flowering ornamental plants, and vegetables.
  https://gillespie.agrilife.org/files/2013/03/Aphids-in-Texas-Landscapes.pdf
- Is crop rotation happening each year? For example, not planting tomatoes or peppers, which are both members of the nightshade family, in the same place each season.

- Healthy vegetables can withstand some aphid damage, but stressed plants are much more susceptible to insect damage. Practicing good irrigation, mulch, and fertilization habits go a long way toward growing healthy vegetables that can tolerate some insect damage and still produce.
- Any beneficial insects introduced will stick around only if there's a food source. Once there's no food source, they'll move on. We think it may be better to use row covers, limit the use of pesticides, including insecticidal soap, to avoid killing the beneficial insects that occur naturally, and practice the other cultural control methods mentioned above.

Resources

AgriLIFE Extension and City of Austin Watershed Protection, earth-wise guide to Aphids, (accessed 6 April 2025), https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2011/03/aphids.pdf

"Aphids in Texas Landscapes", Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, (accessed 6 April 2025), https://gillespie.agrilife.org/files/2013/03/Aphids-in-Texas-Landscapes.pdf

Robinson, James, “Chapter VI: Insect Management”, Texas Vegetable Growers Handbook, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, (accessed 6 April 2025), https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/guides/texas-vegetable-growers-handbook/chapter-vi-insect-management/

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