

Hops Pest and Disease Identification and Control

Everyone who grows hops has seen it: you go out for your daily check-up on the vines, to twirl them where they need to twirl and check for the beginnings of hops, when you see it! Aphid infestation, scale, spider mites! This article is just a quick reference for common pest, disease, and general problems with growing hops (*Humulus lupulus*), and the safest and most effective ways to fix them.

When it comes to pests and disease on something that you plan to consume, you have to be very careful. Even if you plan to boil your homegrown hops in a Fresh Hop Ale, you cannot put any form of chemical on the plant to control pests! Insecticides are measured in Parts Per Million, which means even a small amount has the potential for making you sicker than you've ever been in your life.

First and foremost, I would like to speak of some common pests that like to ruin your hops: Aphids and Spidermites. Surprisingly enough, scale is not very common on hops. When it comes to insecticides, you have a choice. If you're really dedicated, just get a two gallon pump spray, pour in about three seconds of Dawn or whatever dish soap you use, and fill with water, spraying down your problem areas daily to control the infestation. The way the dish soap works is this: All insects have a wax layer on their exoskeletons that protects them from the elements and allows respiration, etcetera. The dish soap pretty much dissolves that, and they die in minutes. Sounds too easy, right? The catch is that it must be done daily because once it dries, it is useless. Outside of that, there are products that contain almost the same thing, that are certified organic, that will work as well. When buying a pesticide, ALWAYS READ THE LABEL!!

For other issues, such as your hops growth is slow and only half of what it was last year, or you're not producing hops, always start with your water. One: What kind of soil do you have? If you have clay or clay like soil, plant your hops on a mound for 'false drainage'. Clay soils hold and keep water, and hops like to have well drained and airy soil. Plant them high and on a mound, and this will increase drainage and air flow to the roots! Two: Does it rain a lot in your area? Are you watering whenever it's not raining? As I said, hops like good drainage, and therefore like to dry out a bit in between watering.

If all your water issues aren't issues at all, and you're still having trouble, fertilize! At the beginning of the season, do a high Nitrogen fertilizer, like Miracle Grow in the hose thingy. Towards the center of the season, give them a high Phosphorus fertilizer, like Miracle Grows Bloom Booster to promote and help with the flowering, or hop production. Towards the end, after harvest, you'll want to give them a nice, low (6-6-6 or something roughly equivalent) to put them to bed. Although Miracle Grow makes some great products, you also might consider going organic. Hey, we're all hippies in this industry anyway, right?! Just remember: the numbers on fertilizer go Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium, or , like Miracle Grow, 34-3-6. To help you choose, try this: Nitrogen equals new growth, Phosphorus equals flowers and reproductive growth, and Potassium equals root growth. Therefore, an 8-35-5 would be primed towards flower growth, so that or something like that is your July fertilizer. As a side note, in general only chemical fertilizers will have such high numbers. The organic fertilizers have lower numbers, but are usually more balanced in the minerals and vitamins. The plus to going organic is that if next year you forget to fertilize, you'll still have plenty of left-over nutrients in the soil, plus naturally made minerals and stuff like that. The hard-core chemical stuff seems to burn all that natural cycle stuff out, and the plants begin to rely wholly on what you give them to sustain them. Your choice!!

Any questions, pictures of homegrown hops, or help troubleshooting, e-mail me.

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