



NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

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Signs Give Clues to Insect Identity

Insects feeding on plants are to be expected during the growing season. Insects such as caterpillars and Japanese beetles are clearly visible on the plant as they feed. Many others leave signs that indicate they are present.

For example, the most common sign of insects are galls. Galls are malformed plant growth produced in response to insect or mite feeding. Leaf galls are most common, typically appearing as bumps or strange growths on the leaf or leaf stalk, often appearing to be eggs. Most leaf galls originated back in spring as buds expanded and leaves developed.

Some galls may be colorful, such as the red maple bladder gall often found on silver maple. Elongated spindle galls are common on cherry and Prunus species. Oaks get many leaf galls, the showiest being oak apple gall, which as the name implies, looks like a small apple. Others look like warts or small disks.



The bottom line about leaf galls is they are harmless, and nothing can be done about them anyway.

Does it look like someone spit on the stem or leaf of your plants? Spittlebugs are the cause and are quite common in our area this year, both on grasses and broadleaf plants. Inside the whitish froth on the plant is a small wedge-shaped insect. Spittlebugs typically are not a threat to plant health. If numbers are high, a forceful stream of water can knock them off plants.

Another insect sign on plant foliage is honeydew. Leaves that look shiny, wet, and sticky is the best description of honeydew. Honeydew is plant fluid (or sap) that has passed through a sap feeding insect, most often aphids or the immature stage of scale insects known as crawlers. Look closely at both the upper and lower leaf surfaces of affected plants to see if the culprit is present (a magnifying glass is helpful).

Both aphids and scale crawlers can be controlled using insecticidal soap products. Spray the insects directly to get control. Insecticidal soap is very friendly to beneficial insects, including ladybugs, which also commonly feed on aphids and scale crawlers. A stream of water in some cases may be enough to knock sap feeders off a plant.

Over time, honeydew may turn black due to a fungus called sooty mold. This is not a disease attacking the plant and fungicides are not needed. The best way to manage sooty mold is to control the aphids or scale that caused the honeydew.

Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County? Feel free to contact:

Bruce Spangenberg
Horticulture Educator
Extension Iron County
300 Taconite Street, Suite 118
Hurley, WI 54534

Phone: 715-561-2695
Email: bruce.spangenberg@wisc.edu

