

Hibiscus Buds Dropping?



Before buying a shrub one must consider how much maintenance will be required. It may seem strange to think that a shrub purchase may result in a regular time commitment or relationship. But some are low maintenance and some are high maintenance. To determine how much involvement may be needed, answer these questions: Is it a heavy fertilizer feeder? Does it have micronutrient requests? Does it need some organic matter for development of its little rootlets? Does it have many pests that require weekly observations and treatments to keep them from ruining the plant? Does it need frequent watering? If the plant's rewards are worth the effort then you go into the relationship with your eyes wide open. Hibiscus are a high maintenance shrub. For many the answer is, "Forget it! They are a weed!" But the answer from many flower appreciating aficionados is a resounding, "YES, I want it!" despite a yes answer to all of the above obligations.

So, let's get familiar with some of the common hibiscus pests so that we know what to look for. These include: aphids, bud drop midge, bud caterpillar, mealybugs, mites, scale insects, snails, slugs, thrips, and whiteflies.

If flowering is sparse, take a closer look at the developing buds. There are two culprits that cause buds to drop off early, the recently introduced flower bud midge and a group of caterpillar larvae that feed inside the buds. These can be prevented by spraying the newly developing buds with a product such as Ortho Rose and Flower Insect Killer (bifenthrin is the active ingredient).



This caterpillar has destroyed the developing flower bud.



Since environmental problems may cause bud drop, cut into off-color buds and buds that have dropped prematurely to check for little white midge maggots.

Scale insects and mites can be managed with light applications (2 ounces per gallon of water) of horticultural mineral oil. Of the 6 or so scale species that attack hibiscus, one that can sneak in and build up, because it blends in with the bark, is the grenade scale. This hard to see soft scale can cause branch dieback.

A soil application of Bayer Advanced Garden™ Tree and Shrub Insect Control (active ingredient is imidacloprid) will suppress the bud pests, mealybugs, soft scales, thrips and whiteflies, It also gives prolonged protection, maybe 4 to 12 months depending on how much organic matter is in the soil.



Grenade scale requires an observant eye to detect on hibiscus twigs.

Before purchasing new hibiscus, inspect plants closely for these pests as they are easily overlooked.

For more information see these web sites:

Bud midge info: <http://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/pesta1rt/midgefin1.htm>

American Hibiscus Society: <http://www.americanhibiscus.org/index.htm>

Our local hibiscus group has a nice web page:
<http://www.naples.net/clubs/hibiscus/index.html>

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