

Southern Red Mites (*Oligonychus ilicis*) Are Active



Red spider mite activity on hibiscus is evident by the yellow swollen areas between the main veins.

Early detection is highly critical with red spider, as populations explode seemingly overnight and defoliate plants. Mite magnet host include hibiscus, angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia* species), certain hollies, pyracantha, junipers, and Sandankwa viburnum.

Damage: Try the tap test, by placing a white piece of paper under the suspect foliage and whack the branch with a pencil 2 times. A magnifying lens comes in handy for distinguishing these reddish-brown, 1/50th inch long critters. Look for webbing (a very fine cob web appearance) on new growth. Mites also feed near the mid-vein on the underside of the leaf. This may cause an upraised interveinal swelling with hibiscus. Mites suck the chlorophyll, which causes a minute flecking which can expand to an overall bronzing-yellowing or graying of the foliage. This leads to premature leaf drop and possibly death.

What To Do: At the first observation of this pest, use a 2% dose of horticultural oil. This product only “gets what it hits” at the time of application, there is no lingering control afterwards. This is good for the beneficial insects and mites. Repeat every 7 to 10 days until the enemy is zapped. Be certain that the label of the chosen product includes plants that will be treated (sprayed) as there could be a bad reaction with certain plants. If you have a heavy population, select a product that kills mites for several days or weeks. Thoroughly spray the undersides of the foliage.

Alternate miticide product use, as resistant mite strains develop if exposed to the same chemical for several years. Avoid using a general insecticide, it can cause mite populations to flare-up, as mites are not affected by many insecticides, but the beneficials are killed and the bad mite populations expand unchecked.

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