



## Mealy bugs Fact Sheet



Mealybugs belong to the same group of insects as scale and aphids. They are a very common pest of indoor plants and plants growing in warm, humid, sheltered sites away from adverse environmental conditions and natural enemies. Mealybugs are so named because many of the known species are covered in a whitish 'mealy' wax, which helps retard the loss of water from their soft bodies. Mealybugs can build up in huge numbers in a very short time and cause considerable damage. They feed by inserting their straw-like mouthparts, known as 'stylets', into plant tissue. Feeding damage can be either by direct removal of plant fluids and nutrients, and/or by the excretion of toxic salivary compounds into plant tissue. Black sooty mould which grows on the waste product (honeydew) of Mealybugs is often the first sign that Mealybugs have taken up residence. Ants may also act as farmers of Mealybugs as they are actively fed honeydew by some species of mealybug.

The real problem with controlling mealy bugs is that they are so well hidden down in leaf axils and also often on the root systems of plants. This means that they tend to be difficult to knock down with any type of sprays (organic or more toxic sprays).

### Control

Because mealybugs have high reproductive capacities and multiple generations in a year, they have the potential to become resistant to pesticides very quickly. The use of stronger and stronger pesticides breeds more and more resistant Mealybugs, until the stage is reached where efficient and practical chemical control of the pest is no longer possible. Fortunately mealybugs can be controlled using 'soft' methods including biological agents and low-toxicity pesticides, most of which are readily available to the horticultural industry and the home gardener. Confidor, oils sprays and pyrethrum based sprays are registered for use. For information on biological control agents such as predatory ladybirds and parasitic wasps contact Australasian Biological Control Association on the free call number 1800 000 160.

Adapted from

[http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/plant\\_info/pests\\_diseases/fact\\_sheets/mealybugs](http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/plant_info/pests_diseases/fact_sheets/mealybugs)