



Azalea or Rhododendron Lace Bug

Azalea and rhododendron lace bugs are tiny (one-eighth of an inch) insects that use piercing mouth parts to empty the contents of leaf cells. Despite the name, lace bugs will attack pieris, laurel, pyracantha, and other broadleaf evergreens in addition to rhododendrons and azaleas. Brushing against a plant with a heavy infestation can cause adults to flit about around the shrub like midges.

These insects work from the bottom of the leaf, causing a yellow or white stippling of the leaves like leafhopper damage. Unlike leafhoppers, lace bugs will leave black “bug specks” (frass) on the underside of the leaves. Damage typically starts to show up in early summer. *Damaged leaves do not recover, so early detection is important.*

While lace bugs don't kill a plant directly, the damage is unsightly, and several years of heavy infestation can weaken a plant or cause it to die.

Life Cycle

Eggs winter over on the underside of the leaf as rusty brown patches along the leaf's midrib. Spiny nymphs hatch as the weather warms up in the spring and begin to feed. The first stage of the nymph is most susceptible to treatment. The rhododendron lace bug has one generation a year, while the azalea lace bug may have several.

Management of Lace Bugs

One option with azaleas is to choose resistant varieties, listed below.

Most resistant azaleas:

- Autumn Amethyst
- Autumn Cheer
- Autumn Rouge
- Autumn Royalty
- Autumn Sangria
- Autumn Twist

Moderately resistant azaleas:

- Autumn Bravo
- Autumn Embers
- Autumn Princess
- Autumn Ruby
- Autumn Starlite
- Hino Crimson
- Rosebud

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Stressed plants are more susceptible, so keep your broadleaf evergreen plants healthy by locating them properly and providing proper water and fertilizer. Rhododendrons and azaleas in full sun or suffering from drought may suffer greater damage.

Mechanical control

If you suspect a problem, in late winter or early spring look for rusty brown patches along the midribs of the undersides of leaves. These are the egg sacs for the coming spring. It may make sense to remove heavily infested leaves. In the spring, watch for small spiny larvae. When they appear, start hosing them off with a strong stream of water.

Chemical Control

Dormant oil does not smother eggs, but all-season oil, kaolin clay, or insecticidal soap can be used to smother larvae and adults. Spinosad and permethrin will also kill them. Begin spraying at first sight of the nymphs, focusing on the underside of the leaf.

As always, to protect pollinators, do not spray plants that are in flower, and always follow all label directions.

Products and pesticides for management

Organic Insecticides

Surround Naturally occurring **kaolin clay** smothers the larvae on contact.

Bonide® Captain Jack's Dead Bug contains Spinosad, an extract from the fermentation broth of naturally occurring bacteria. Kills the bugs on ingestion.

Bonide® All Seasons Horticultural Oil smothers the bugs on contact.

Bonide® Insecticidal Soap kills the bugs on contact.

Bonide® Insecticidal Super Soap contains both soap to smother the bugs on contact and Spinosad to leave a residue to kill those that were missed on spray.

Bonide® Bon-Neem® Use if you are experiencing multiple problems. Contains neem oil, which both smothers bugs and protects against fungal problems, plus pyrethrin to kill bugs on ingestion.

Chemical Insecticides

Bonide® Eight- Permethrin is related chemically to naturally-occurring pyrethrin. Reapply after rain.