

RED SPIDER MITE

Detection:

These are tiny spiders with bristly backs hardly visible with the naked eye. If you were using a hand lens you would be able to see that the creatures have eight legs rather than the six typical of insects. In very heavy infestations, they spin small webs that are clearly visible on the bottom of leaves, between leaves, over flower buds and between forks of the plant. More commonly, small yellow or brown spots (stipples) also appear on the tops of the leaves. A severe infestation will give the plant a dusty look, the leaves will eventually turn a rusty red colour before dropping off. For early detection, it's worth while placing a piece of white paper under the plant or a single leaf and then tapping it. The small mites (about the size of fine sand) are easy to see on the white background as they crawl around.

Control:

Spider mites dislike humidity so misting the plant regularly may slow their reproductive rate. Adding a little insecticidal soap and methylated spirits to the water in your mister will also aid in the battle against this most persistent pest. Remove the webs and the spider mites by washing the plant in soapy tepid water, paying particular attention to the underside of all the leaves. For tough plants, a forceful jet of water can be used. Washing will not always remove all the eggs so repeat the treatment every 3 to 4 days until the plant is clear to ensure its success. For severe infestations, it may be best simply to destroy the plant, to prevent the contamination of any other plants. Biological control is also available as is an organic spray "2 in 1".