

Tips to Control Aphids on Milkweed



The oleander aphid (*Aphis nerii*), sometimes called the milkweed aphid, is a non-native bug often found on milkweed plants. It is a bright yellow insect with black legs, and stalks known as cornicles on the back of the abdomen. Their presence limits the ability of monarchs to use the milkweed plants for reproduction.

Tip #1: Plant onions and marigolds around your milkweed garden. These plants have been shown to repel aphids and naturally reduce their numbers. Planting these repellents close to milkweed can attract more butterflies while keeping aphid numbers down to reasonable levels.

Tip #2: Encourage predators of aphids like ladybugs to visit your garden.

Ladybugs can eat up to 50 aphids in just one day. To attract them to your garden, plant flat-topped flowers such as yarrow or dill. To keep them in your garden, provide them a place to overwinter by creating a ladybug hotel. Tie a few pieces of bamboo together, add straw around the sides for insulation, and place it a few feet from the ground in a sheltered, sunny spot.



Tip #3: Check your plants daily or as often as possible. It is important to remove and dispose of aphids immediately even if there are only one or two as they will quickly become an “aphid army” that infests the plant.



Tip #4: If there are only a few aphids, remove and dispose of them with your fingers or gloves. You can squish them between your fingers (use gloves to avoid staining your fingers) or drop them into a mason jar with isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol in it.

Tip #5: If there is an infestation on just a few leaves, remove those leaves.

Put the leaves in a plastic bag, spray the aphids with isopropyl alcohol, and then seal the bag and dispose of it. Thoroughly check the rest of the plant to make sure there are no remaining aphids.

Tip #6: If the infestation is only on a few of the plants, then consider completely removing those plants as long as there are plants remaining for the monarchs to use. Thoroughly check the rest of the plants to make sure there are no remaining aphids. You should remove and dispose of any aphids that you find on the remaining plants.

Tip #7: If the aphids have infested ALL of your milkweed, you may need to use a 16 oz spray bottle with an isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol solution to dislodge them from the plants. Fill the spray bottle with a mixture of 14 oz of



Before spraying the aphids off of the plant(s), you should relocate any monarch caterpillars from the infected plant(s) to other milkweed that is not infected with aphids or try to raise the monarchs indoors.

For tips on raising butterflies indoors, see the Alabama Wildlife Federation’s Bloomin’ Butterflies activity at https://www.alabamawildlife.org/uploadedFiles/File/Outdoor_Classroom_Activity_Bloomin_Butterflies_k12.pdf

water, 1 Tbsp of liquid soap, 1 Tbsp of isopropyl / rubbing alcohol, and 1 Tbsp of vinegar. Hold the milkweed plant with your other hand as you spray it to avoid stem or leaf breakage.

Tip #8: Always check for monarch eggs and caterpillars before spraying the aphids with water or an isopropyl alcohol solution because you could injure or dislodge the eggs or caterpillars in the process!

If you find monarch eggs near the aphids, avoid spraying those areas as the alcohol solution is lethal. Instead, dip cotton swabs into the isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol and dab the aphids with the cotton swabs to exterminate them. Of course, be careful not to touch the monarch eggs and caterpillars in the process.

Tip #9: If aphids are wedged into the nooks and crannies, use a small brush to brush them off the plants or use a piece of rolled-up duct to pull them off the plants.

Tip #10: Always collect and dispose of any living aphids after they have been removed. This will help prevent them from returning to the milkweed.

Do not use pesticides!

The pesticides that kill the aphids will kill the butterflies, eggs, and caterpillars.

Information compiled by the Alabama Wildlife Federation. For more details visit the Sources below:

Monarch Butterfly Garden @ <https://monarchbutterflygarden.net/control-aphids-milkweed-plants/>

Los Angeles Times @ <https://www.latimes.com/home/la-xpm-2012-nov-09-la-lh-milkweed-aphids-monarch-butterfly-eggs-20121104-story.html>

Save Our Monarchs @ <https://www.saveourmonarchs.org/blog/how-to-get-rid-of-aphids-on-milkweed>

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Department's BUG SQUAD @ [https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=15155#:~:text=The%20lady%20beetle%20\(family%20Coccinellidae,eggs%20and%20larvae%20\(caterpillars\)\)](https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=15155#:~:text=The%20lady%20beetle%20(family%20Coccinellidae,eggs%20and%20larvae%20(caterpillars)))

The Old Farmer's Almanac @ <https://www.almanac.com/attracting-ladybugs-garden-beneficial>

National Science Foundation @ https://www.nsf.gov/news/mmg/mmg_disp.jsp?med_id=67178&from=