

GROWERTALKS

Columns

3/22/2011

Confessions of an Entomophobe

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Working for Ball Horticultural Co. during the first six-plus years of my career in the industry helped mold me for the sights that I now behold when I visit greenhouses and garden centers. Not just the different types of plants, container sizes and growing media, but also the not-so-great part of being a grower—dealing with insects and diseases.

My first run-in with these pests was when I was helping out our photographer Mark Widhalm during a photo shoot. I was holding a pot of bracteantha very closely—almost hugging it because it was in a large container—when Mark told me not to get too close because the plant was crawling with aphids.

WHAT?!

I'm proud of myself for not dropping the plant and sprinting for the door. I calmly placed the pot on the table, backed away a safe distance and proceeded to itch all over for the better part of the shoot.

I admit it. I'm afraid of bugs. (I'm *deathly* afraid of spiders, but that's a discussion for another time.) And working in the hort industry forces me to face my fears once in a while. My phobia was challenged head on last September when I attended OFA's Disease, Insect & Plant Growth Conference in St. Louis. During the tour, we got a glimpse of some of the pest issues the local growers and garden centers were dealing with.

My reporting duties ensured I was up close and personal with leafminers, Cuban laurel thrips and other greenhouse beasties. Thankfully, I survived unscathed, but I learned so much about the different ways growers try to combat insects and diseases that always seem to find their way into their greenhouse, regardless of the best efforts to prevent them.

This issue focuses on managing those pests, with the latest information from industry experts to help you detect and control any outbreaks, big or small. From what the professionals say, prevention is the key to saving your crops, which is what Ann Chase of Chase Horticultural Research discusses in her article about effective fungicide rotations.

Most growers use those yellow or blue sticky cards to detect insect invasions, and Leanne Pundt from the University of Connecticut tells us the optimal ways these tools can be utilized to monitor pests. Do you use biological controls for part or all of your production? Or are you thinking about trying them? Read tips from Julie Graesch of Becker Underwood on how parasitic nematodes can control fungus gnats. And don't let all the chemical names scare you away from Raymond Cloyd's Pest Management piece—you won't want to miss this information about pesticide metabolites, which is the first article ever to be published on the topic.

As for my insect phobia, I'm coping. Thank you for asking. Unfortunately, I've unintentionally passed my bug fears along to my 2-year-old daughter. However, she can still sit through an episode of "Miss Spider's Sunny Patch Friends" without cringing.

Mommy, on the other hand, is left to ponder why even animated spiders and bed bugs can make her squeamish.