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CATERPILLARS

No insect eats your plants with as much gusto as caterpillars. These are immature moths or butterflies, and they are hungry! When they take a bite it really shows because they are hundreds of times larger than mites or aphids.

Watch for them.

If you see more than the odd moth or butterfly hovering about your plants, than you might be seeing caterpillars before too long.

Dealing with them is much easier and more effective if you catch the problem early.

Under the leaves or on the soil near the base of the plant are good places to look.

Because they eat, they produce a by-product. Frass is the polite name for caterpillar poop. Look for small black pellets on the foliage.

Just pick them off, and look again tomorrow.

You may have to closely examine your plants until you get used to their hiding spots. Once you've seen one you'll be able to spot more. Picking them off is quite effective at controlling the problem. Dispose of them in soapy water or they'll just climb back up and keep eating.

Spray with an insecticide. If you've really got an infestation, you can spray with an insecticide and get more control.

Spray with an organic product.

Oils and soaps will smother insects and their eggs, and can work well.

Spray early in the morning, when the leaf is not in full sun.

Bacillus thuringiensis is a bacteria that you spray so the caterpillar dies from the bacterial infection. You'll need to spray it several times, a few days apart, to get the best control.

Captain Jack products contain Spinosad, a bacterial by-product. It works well on many kinds of caterpillars as well as some small insects.

Pyrethrins are from derived from a type of mum plant (pyrethrum daisy). Spray at sunset, as sunlight breaks Pyrethrins down to a harmless product.

Spray with a traditional chemical

'Eight' or 'Beetle Killer': These are chemicals related to Pyrethrins, but they are synthetic. They are more effective and last longer than Pyrethrins.

'Sevin' is an old but good product for controlling caterpillar and other large insects like beetles.