

Do you Know What's Bugging your Plants?
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After the rains and warm weather, many landscape trees and shrubs are sending out new growth flushes. When this occurs it is time to start your weekly scouting for insects on your plants. Look at a few leaves, the upper and lower leaf surface and the stems for stickiness, bumps, leaf discoloration, or chewing damage. Concentrate on your landscape plants that had previous pest problems, such as scale and aphids that typically occur on new plant growth. Use a 10 to 15 power magnifying glass to aid in insect identification. Not all insects damage plants. If you spot insects on your plants, don't assume it is a pest insect as there are many beneficial insects as well. It is important to identify your insects before you spray.

Two voracious pest insect predators (the good bugs) found in the Keys--the Green Lacewing and the Lady Beetle--are welcome visitors to the garden. These insects go through a four-stage life cycle: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Each life stage looks different. Become familiar with each stage, so you don't inadvertently destroy them. They may be controlling your pest insects so you won't have too.

Green lacewings are common insects, found on weeds and shrubs. Most are greenish with copper-colored eyes and about 3/4 inch in length. The wings are transparent with many veins, which give them the name lacewings. The adults may feed on insects, pollen, or honeydew.

Lacewing eggs are deposited at the end of long hair-like stalks which are attached to the leaf. It looks like a miniature Q-tip on a leaf. This prevents the larvae from cannibalizing each other.

Lacewing larvae are elongate and have large sickle-shaped mandibles. They are active, but sluggish and soft-bodied, with raised bumps and long hair. They are commonly called aphid lions and feed on aphids, scale, mealybugs, other small insects and eggs.

Lady beetles or **lady bugs** are among the most beneficial of insects. Both the adults and larvae of lady beetles are predaceous on aphids, immature scale insects, mealybugs, mites, and other soft-bodied insect pests as well as insect eggs. Adult lady beetles are oval shaped and most are orange or reddish with black markings. Most lady beetles are about 1/4 inch long, but many range from 1/16 to 1/2 inch.

Lady Beetle eggs are located on the underside of plant leaves and are generally yellow in color.

Lady Beetle larvae are elongated, somewhat flattened and covered with small spines. They are usually dark or black with bright colored spots or bands. The legs are long and slender. Adults and larvae are frequently found feeding among aphid populations. Studies have found that 200-500 aphids are consumed during the larval stage, depending on the species. Lady beetles usually pupate on the leaves of plants, suspending themselves by the tip of the abdomen by means of a sticky secretion.

If you have an insect that you want identified, send me a digital photo at kgabel@ufl.edu, or bring the insect to the UF/IFAS/Monroe County Extension Office at 1100 Simonton Street, Suite 2-260 in Key West.