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EC1532 Red Spider

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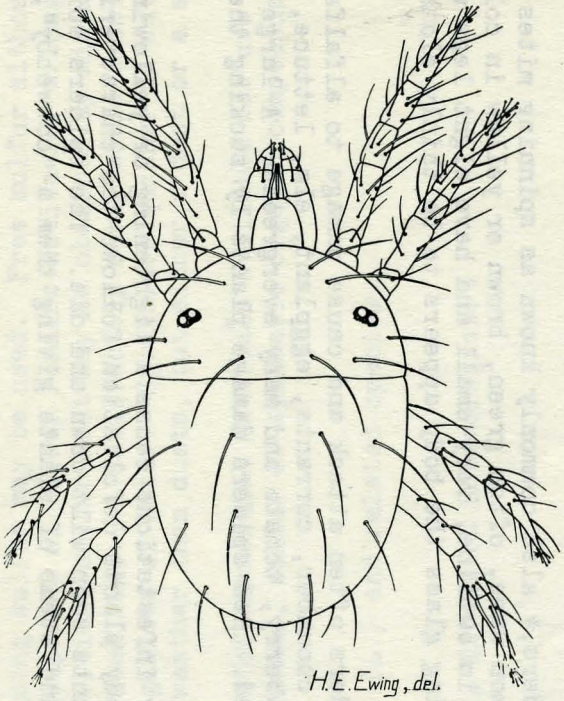
Red Spider



Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics
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Department of Agriculture cooperating. W. H. Brokaw Director, Lincoln.

RED SPIDERS

Description: Red spiders,* also commonly known as spinning mites or spider mites, are, contrary to their common name, often green, brown or yellow in color. They are usually round or nearly round in outline, very small and have eight legs when fully grown. When viewed with a magnifying glass the body appears to be thinly clothed with long rigid hairs.

Host plants: Red spiders often attack and cause damage to alfalfa, apple, beans, blackberry, chrysanthemum, cucumber, currants, eggplant, elm, lettuce, peach, pear, pepper, raspberry, rose, strawberry, tomato and many evergreens. A large number of other plants are frequently infested. Red spiders damage plants by sucking the plant juices from the leaves.

Type of injury: Heavy infestations cause a lightening or yellowing of the leaves of infested plants. In woody plants defoliation follows the characteristic leaf yellowing, whereas herbaceous plants soon wilt down and die. The spiders spin very fine irregular webs over the leaves and stems of plants giving them a "cobwebby", unsightly appearance.

Life history: Adult mites hibernate during the winter and begin laying their eggs in the hot, dry weather of early summer. Eggs are laid on the leaves of plants and hatch in three to five days. The young mites which are quite similar to the adults in appearance require about 10 days in hot dry weather to mature. The characteristic webs afford protection from wind and rain to the eggs and young mites. Several generations are produced out of doors in the summer and the mites will live and breed the year around in greenhouses or on house plants.

Control measures: Red spider infestations are favored by warm, dry weather. In spite of the protection of the webbing, rains tend to wash the mites off of the plants. Wet weather also favors the development of their natural enemies. Effective control may be easily obtained by frequent thorough sprinklings under strong water pressure. Plain water sprayed through a coarse nozzle from an ordinary knapsack sprayer will give adequate control if the sprayings are made frequently.

Under conditions where sprinkling is not feasible or does not give adequate control sprays or dusts containing sulfur may be used. Free sulfur although somewhat slower in its action than some compounds of sulfur remains active for a longer time and is usually more effective. An efficient sulfur dust may be obtained by mixing 9 lbs. of dry sulfur with one pound of hydrated lime. A satisfactory spray would consist of one pound of wettable sulfur in 10 gallons of water. Sprays are quicker in action and therefore more effective in cool wet weather than dusts, but either a dust or a spray applied thoroughly will give control.

There are a number of commercial materials available for use against red spiders. These contain oil emulsions, sulfur or synthetic organic compounds and often may be used to advantage.

* Tetranychus telarius (L.) and related species.

Prepared by M. H. Muma, Extension Entomologist.