

Mealy Bugs: The Eternal Plague

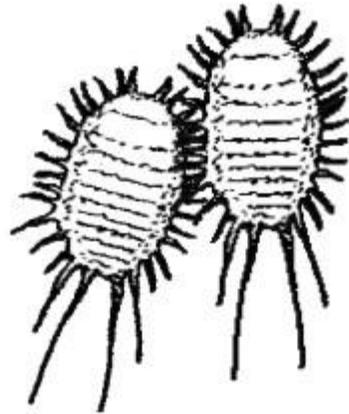
Question from Keith Nelson to Ron McHatton at AOS:

Occasionally I have a mealy bug show up on a promising spike or bud (imagine that!) usually a Paph or Phrag. I do pick off the bugs I see but for treatment, can soap or imidacloprid be safely applied to buds? Any other suggestions?

Reply from Ron McHatton:

Keith, if you really see only an occasional bug, you might be better off just continuing to remove them rather than trying to spray something that might damage buds. If you do treat them, I would avoid using anything on the buds themselves because you will always run the risk of physical damage. Imidacloprid (as well as 99% of the other systemics) is actually taken up far more efficiently by the root system than it is the foliage so drenches are much more efficient and have the added advantage of getting to the source of many of these "recurring" problems - scale and mealybugs on the roots. The only exception to this is Orthene® and in that case, foliage uptake is about as efficient as is root uptake. If you chose to treat with imidacloprid, water the plants thoroughly the day before and let them drain. Then apply the pesticide solution to the leaves only as a spray and into the potting mix to the point that it drips out of the drainage holes. This will give you some foliar uptake and get the pesticide to the roots. Because the plants are thoroughly watered the day before, the pesticide remains in the liquid state far longer in the potting medium, improving root uptake. You can treat a second time about a week to 10 days later.

What some growers do is to wrap a bit of cotton batting (like a cotton ball, not material - you want that fuzzy surface) around the



inflorescence below the first bud. This helps prevent crawling insects from crawling up the spike and onto the buds because of the texture of the cotton surface. It also works for slugs and snails as long as the cotton barrier is wide enough that the creature can't bridge it. If it's too narrow, the slug or snail will arch over it grasping the stem above it and tolerate the annoyance long enough to pull itself over.