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My Cherry Tree Is Covered With Small Black Bugs; What Should I Do?

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A weekly question/answer column

My Cherry Tree Is Covered With Small Black Bugs; What Should I Do?

Mike Reding answers:*

The black bugs are called black cherry aphid. The cool, wet spring appears to have been very good for the aphids. Most of the time I have seen these pests on shoots down low and near the trunk of the tree. If this is the case in your situation and you have an established tree (not young or newly planted) these aphids will do no harm. On very young trees they can cause the shoots to become deformed and even stunt the tree's growth.

- If the aphids are up high in the tree and honeydew (sticky stuff secreted by the aphids) is getting on the fruit, you may want to apply an insecticide to control them. However, once the aphids have caused the leaves to curl they are very difficult to kill even with an insecticide. By midsummer most of the aphids should leave the trees and migrate to weeds in the mustard family.
- Check the colonies and see if you can find aphids with wings. These will be leaving the trees. At this time of year each generation of aphids produces more and more winged forms, which will leave the trees.
- When checking the colonies look for enemies of the aphids such as lady bugs (adults and larvae) and lacewing larvae. These predatory insects will eat the aphids and sometimes they can clean up entire colonies.
- You should only spray as a last resort. Diazinon, Malathion or insecticidal soap can be used. You may need two or three treatments with the soap, but it is the safest product. However, if the temperature is very warm (80+ degrees), soap can cause some burning of the leaves.
- The best time to treat for black cherry aphids is in early spring when the trees are in sidegreen to greentip (buds are beginning to swell and you can see some green between the budscales). At that time apply a treatment of dormant oil plus Supracide 2EC. This will kill the aphids as they hatch from their eggs and should take care of the aphids for the rest of the season.

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* Mike Reding, Utah State University Extension Biology Specialist