

Cause and Effect  
By Ralph D. Count

Too many of our members will frequently do something about an Effect and ignore the Cause. For example: they will happen to notice that some of the tips on their fuchsias are infested with aphids and will immediately reach for their hand sprayer to give said pests a ducking with insecticide. But they will pay little or no attention to ants on the branches or ground below.

One notice member said to me last spring: "I often wonder how aphids get on my fuchsias, especially those in hanging baskets." And when I replied that ants probably put most of them there she would not believe me, and said it was no joking matter with her.

So, there it was again; she was trying to cure an Effect but not a Cause, for that ants do propagate aphids on fuchsias is a fact that has been scientifically proven.

This is not the place for a long dissertation on the various genera of ants, so let us consider only those commonly found in our gardens. Nearly all species live in large communities in underground caverns with a maze of connecting galleries and are composed of three sorts of individuals—males, females and neuters. The males soon perish after beginning of the spring season and the females then devote their entire attention to egg laying and propagation. The neuters in many colonies are generally divided into two classes. First, and most numerous is the ordinary neuter, or worker and, secondly, the soldiers who are provided with strong and heavy jaws suitable for fighting enemy ants from other colonies. The working neuters perform all the labors of the ant colony; they excavate the galleries, procure food and wait upon the care for the larvae until they are fit to leave their cells. They are apparently endowed with the power of communicating with each other—probably with their antennae or feelers—the result of their searches for food and thus obtain the cooperation of several where the strength of one would be insufficient. The soldier neuters of some species often raid the colonies of others and kidnap the neuters there to become slaves and workers.

But the fact that concerns us most in our gardens is the subservience of aphides or plant lice, to their use by the ants. The aphides are remarkable for their ability to eject from their bodies tiny droplets of a sweet, lipid fluid. Not only do the ants profit by this when it is found on the leaves but by lightly stroking the aphid with its antennae the ant can cause the insect to exude a drop of the fluid at will. Then the ant will visit another and another insect until it is loaded with food for the young in its colony.

The aphides have been appropriately called the cows or dairy herds of the ants which, in fact, seem to regard them as their peculiar property; not only taking great care of them but often fighting for their possession. So sensible are the ants realizing the great value to them of these dairy herds that they often carry the eggs of the aphides into their nests where they hatch. Some species of ants keep their aphides in their underground galleries during periods of bad weather where they feed on roots of the plants overhead. Later these aphides are carried by the ants up the trunks of bushes and trees whose leaves are soon infested with the plant lice.

Maybe this explanation of the character and habits of ant will prove the futility of working against. Effect and ignoring Cause. In other words: killing the aphides and doing nothing about the ants who are primarily responsible for their being on the plants. This is not to imply that every aphid on your fuchsias or other garden plants is placed there by ants,

these pestiferous aphides get on plants via other routes as well but the point is that the ants nourish and protect the aphides and are their prime propagators.

Therefore, in protecting your fuchsias and other garden plants from aphides give attention to the elimination of all ants. The methods which can be used for this purpose are numerous and varied but the main point of attack should always be their colonies or nests and the writer has found chlordane dust to be most effective at these points. However, do not use a puff gun for this purpose but rather place the powder in a shaker top can and scatter it plentifully in and around the opening to their underground galleries and also along the trails they are using. Keep close watch and make renewed applications in case they break out at other places.

Anyway, and by using whatever method you may choose, kill the ants in your garden and you will eliminate a large percentage of the aphides on your fuchsias.

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