

## AWARD OF MERIT WINNER

### TAKING A SECOND LOOK Dorothy Wall, *Consulting Rosarian*

I can't count the number of times that I am called or asked at meetings about 'insects on my roses.' My first question is always "Just what exactly are they (wormlike critters, flying beetles, etc.) DOING to your roses?"

Too many times the answer is imprecise - the person asking the question is not sure the bugs are actually doing anything but insects on roses are just bound to be up to no good, aren't they?

So the knee-jerk reaction is, when any insect has the temerity to be perching on the roses - reach for the bug spray and zap 'em!

Most people recognize lady bug beetles with their easily identifiable coloring, but their larvae, who incidentally do most of the work of eating aphids, are not recognized.

Leather-wings or Soldier Beetles (and what a great name) are looked at with suspicion. I've noticed they don't always wear the same uniform, varying from brown to an orangish color. But their mission is the same; cleaning up the bad bugs in the garden.

This year my garden has been gifted with a great number of Syrphid or Hover Flies. Hover fly is a much better name, because I'm never sure just how to pronounce Syrphid, and because they surely do hover! It would be easy to wonder just what are they doing hovering over your roses like so many little helicopters? Well, the truth of the matter is, all they are doing is taking some sips of nectar and looking for a place to lay their eggs. They are also pollinators. It is the juveniles that do the work of consuming aphids, although I'm sure they are not aware of it as being 'work', since all they are really doing is being a glutton; in the process, one larvae disposes of hundreds of aphids in a single day!

These worm-like or maggot-like guys are often confused with those little green worms that often appear in the spring, especially if you live near oak trees, that do eat your roses. But there is a big difference; the green worms or leaf-rollers as the descriptive name implies, chew the leaves & blooms. They grow into larger worms & do not have the distinctive yellowish stripe down their center that distinguishes the hover fly larvae.

By taking a second look, you can see them actually holding up an aphid and tipping back to sip out the juices. Reminds me of a thirsty patron of a saloon in an old west movie! This one-by-one approach might seem like a very tedious and slow solution to a large aphid infestation. But they are gluttons and literally drink their whole life away, until two or three weeks later they fall to the ground where they await emerging again as an adult to begin the life cycle all over again. This may happen as many times a season as seven generations. At the end of the season the pupae will remain in the soil around the base of the rose.

An interesting observation here is the fact that I neglected to do any dormant spraying last pruning season. I am sure the reason there has been so many hover flies in my garden this year is because one of the functions of applying dormant spray is to kill any insects that are harboring over in the soil under the roses. That would certainly include the pupating hover fly! I never did like to dormant spray so am glad to find an excellent excuse to not do it.

I really hate to beat the subject to death but it bears repeating AND repeating: please read the label on any product you buy before you buy it! I literally cringe every time I see certain products on the store shelves that are so-called "All-In-One". Ask yourself "What are my goals?" Do you not want to make your garden a welcoming place for bees & butterflies & birds? An insecticide does not discriminate. Applying an insecticide to the soil is especially harmful; not only is it dangerous to pets who may be exposed to it but it will kill earthworms as well as the above mentioned pupae. It is very toxic so beware if you are working with your hands in the soil where some of this product has been used. It stays in the soil for a long time.

When you think about it there are not that many insects that harm roses. The one most people seem to be concerned about is aphids. True, they are not a pretty sight and I do not like them either, but they are so easily dispersed without lethal means. Even with all the help I've had with the beneficial insects, I will take the garden hose and spray them off if they are getting ahead of the good guys. No harm in that.

Some new gardeners mistake the cast off skins of dead aphids for live insects. They're white or gray, with a flaky look. Lots of these 'leftovers' indicate that some garden helper has made a good meal of aphids.

There is no "All-In-One" product that can take the place of careful observation as to what your roses need. Sprinkling a combination of chemicals around the base of the plant is a pretty poor excuse for caring for your roses or other plants.

We all know the secret to growing great roses is in the soil. Well, it's no secret. Our grandmothers (and grandfathers) knew that! If the soil is not organically enriched and friable to allow oxygen in, no amount of "All-In-One" Rose Care will produce good roses, never mind great! Yes, I know it sounds so easy. It's like in Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through The Looking Glass*. "Drink this" or "Eat this". But most times the easy way out is just the lazy way out; you can't expect the roses to do their best work if you don't!

Learn to let Nature work with you. There's some mighty interesting things going on out there if you just slow down and **take a second look!**