

MEALY BUGS

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Cinco de Mayo Fiesta?

While sitting on my patio, I could hear the partying. The noisemakers were creating a cacophony of merriment. As I got closer, I could almost see the tiny party hats. The sticky white honeydew gave them away. A mealy bug party!

I think that the allure of the succulent juices brings mealy bugs from miles around for a feast in my stapelias. They call their aunts, uncles, and cousins for a grand family reunion. They especially love the junctures of the stems and roots, hiding in the tiny creases and crevices. Inserting their mouthpiece, they suck out the luxuriant juices. And the life.

First line of defense is diligence. Check weekly for withered plants, spying carefully below the soil level for the white sticky substance that indicates their presence (the bugs themselves are too tiny to see). Once discovered, I get out the rubbing alcohol. Dip a Q-tip in some alcohol and dab each little partyer. It's instant death by burning.

Some gardeners prefer a blast of water, especially when a block party is found under plant leaves and along stems. But remember, the spray knocks off the old and feeble, leaving the macho males and Amazonian females who then produce super-tough kids.

When I feel outnumbered and over-powered, I do battle with poison. Products that contain acephate (O2s-dimethyl) acetylphosphoramidothioate as the main ingredient is the only thing I've found that works on my stapelia's mealy bugs. Know that some species of mealy bugs do not respond to insecticidal systemics.

If you need to break up a loud party, do what I do. Dab each partygoer with a Q-tip, look 'em in the eye and say, *hasta luego*, baby!