

My War with Mealybugs

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Mealybugs are a good argument for reincarnation. Just when you think the last one is dead, you find a new fluffy white patch, usually on your favorite plant.

This is a story of one person's encounter, no, WAR with mealies.

I am fairly new cactophile with a mixed collection grown under lights. I had never had meal bugs, but I certainly heard of them. All the books warned that new plants should be quarantined before introducing them into a collection. A time period was not mentioned so I tried one week. Believe me, that is not enough!

One day I purchased an *Aeonium* species, and after one week, I carefully inspected it and put it on my light table. About two dozen plants became infected, and the *Aeonium* showed signs of damage. I inspected my plants, removing bugs with alcohol soaked Q-tips. After recovering from a light hangover, the mealies were back in force, and many of my previously healthy plants were now infested.

At the point, I reached for the heavy artillery, and got hold of a systemic insecticide containing the chemical Di-Syston. I applied it to the infested plants in addition to repeating the alcohol treatment. This seemed to work for about a month, and then, the little white monsters started reappearing. At this point, in desperation, I treated every single plant with the systemic insecticide and scrubbed by light table with disinfectant and soap. I repeated the treatment twice at two-

week intervals. I have now been free of mealy bugs for about eight months.

This experience taught me several things. I now quarantine all new plants for two months, and anything showing signs of infestation gets three treatments with the Di-Syston before it gets added to my collection. There are many members who may think is over-reacting, but after having 60-70% of my collection affected and losing several of my favorite plants, I am taking no chances.

Since my collection is mixed, I also learned that mealybugs will attack almost anything. I have even found them attaching a three-inch diameter trunk of a mimosa tree (yes, the tree looked worse for wear), and on the roots of a common carpet-forming spurge which I cannot seem to clear out. They prefer the leafier types of plants, but are not averse to *Lithops* or almost any other plant which has nooks and crannies in which they can hide.

My cacti were much less effected than my other succulents except the globose *Euphorbias* which were all unscathed.

I have not expert advice to offer on eradicating mealy bugs, but I hope this story may be useful to others.