

**Dear IPM....**

***Starting in late May I began noticing shiny droplets of sticky liquid falling onto my car, deck and house near birch trees. What is this stuff, where does it come from and how can I get rid of it?***

The sticky shiny liquid is honeydew from birch aphids that have infested your trees. Aphids hatch in mid May and can continue to be a problem in Anchorage until the end of August. The honeydew itself is not permanent and is easily washed away, but the aphids themselves can create an additional stress for urban trees.

Aphids can reproduce *parthenogenetically* (without mating) and in bouts of warm weather this rapid reproduction may lead to population explosions. When large numbers of aphids are present, the most important thing is to maintain the health of the tree. Water the tree consistently through warm dry weather and avoid compacting the soil further or causing damage to the trunk or roots.

Birch aphids feed on birch and other trees by sucking the sugary sap from leaves and small twigs. The feeding habits of these insects can cause *chlorosis* (the yellowing or discoloring of leaves), in addition to stunted growth and occasional early leaf drop. Generally, a healthy tree can withstand at least 2-3 years of heavy aphid infestation before they affect tree health.

Aphids are an important food source for many forest predators, such as wasps and ladybug larvae. Spraying with a broad-spectrum insecticide will often only worsen the situation, as aphid populations rebound much faster than those of their natural predators. However two products can be used without much of a detrimental effect to other organisms. Insecticidal Soap and Neem oil are both spray-on, contact insecticides that kill soft-bodied insects (such as caterpillar larvae or aphids) without harming their hard bodied predators (wasps, ants or ladybugs). These products can be found at any garden or feed store. It is against U.S. law to use any product in a manner inconsistent with its labeling. Remember to always follow the instructions exactly as listed on the product.

A jet of pressurized hose water sprayed at tree branches or leaves can also be somewhat effective in controlling aphids. Although hosing your trees down won't kill all the bugs, it will knock many of them off, and any attempts to reduce the population help!

If you have more questions or would like more information on Birch Aphids, contact the Cooperative Extension Service Integrated Pest Management Office at: 786-6300 Or send an inquiry [here](#).