Now that the cold weather has turned our gardening focus indoors, we can pay extra attention to our houseplants. If any of your potted plants spent time outside this summer, they may be providing a home and food for uninvited guests. These pests may have even come indoors through a window screen. Some insects hide in the undersides of leaves or in the soil making it difficult to spot them before telltale signs of damage appear.

A shiny, sticky, insect excretion on the leaves called honeydew can be a sign of mealybugs, aphids or scales. Honeydew provides an excellent environment for the growth of black sooty mold that can cover leaves, branches and pots. Once honeydew is spotted, look on the stems for small, white cottony patches; this would be mealybugs.

Aphids leave crinkled and curled leaf damage along with honeydew. They generally congregate around tender, new growth. Scale damage causes pale and discolored leaves.

Spider mites are to blame if you notice a fine webbing between the stems and the leaves and also foliage that is yellowed or stippled. Whitefly damage is from sap sucking and causes yellowing, stunting and premature leaf drop. Whiteflies also produce honeydew.

Description and control for these pests are listed below:

**Mealybugs** are ¼ inch long, white or grayish, fluffy looking insects attached to the stems and stem axils.

**Aphids** are small insects of any color but mostly green and usually found on the undersides of leaves and stems. They suck the plant’s juice leaving distorted greenery.

**Scale** insects are round or oval, flat or bumpy depending on the type and attached themselves to stems and leaf undersides. They have a piercing-sucking, needle-like mouthpart that sucks the juices from the leaves and stems.

**Spider mites** are 1/16th inch, eight-legged animals in the arachnid group that can be yellow, green, red, tan or orange. They look like tiny dots moving on the plant. Spider mites cause dull and yellow stippled leaves.
**Whiteflies** are tiny $\frac{1}{16}$-inch long, tiny white-winged insects that fly off the plant when disturbed. As immatures, whiteflies resemble mealybugs and scales with fringe.

Control for all of these insects begins with isolation of the infected plant to prevent the insects from attacking other houseplants. Place the potted plant in a sink or the tub to allow a good hosing down with water by the spray nozzle to knock off most insects.

Aphids congregating on the stems can be wiped off with a soapy cloth. Mealybugs can be killed by touching each insect with a cotton swab dipped in 70% isopropyl alcohol. Rub any scale insects off stems and leaves, and wipe the plant down with cotton balls dipped in alcohol. Spider mites like hot and dry conditions, so after hosing them off with water try to keep the humidity up by frequently misting the plant and placing it on a tray of pebbles and water. Whiteflies generally need to be controlled with some type of insecticide but pick off the most heavily infested leaves first.

Most of the above insects can be controlled with insecticidal soap. As a rule, mealybugs and scale are quite difficult to control. Either plan on being very persistent or discard the plant. Insecticidal soaps are safe and easy to apply. They are made from salts of various fatty acids and are usually mixed with water and alcohol. Insecticidal soaps can be purchased either as a concentrate or premixed. They kill the insect on contact. There is no residual killing action once the soap dries so thoroughly cover the plant with the spray. Watch for any new hatching of insects and respray as the label directs.

For information on controlling pests on your houseplants or for other garden related queries, call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center (toll-free) at (877) 486-6271, visit our site, or get in touch with your local Cooperative Extension Center.