

FUNGUS AMONG US!

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Given that Beltane and rose-season are just around the corner, we might spare a thought for what comes after--brown spot on roses, powdery mildew on Crape Myrtles and other plants, aphids sucking the sap from tender shoots.

Old-timers simply threw old dishwater on their plants to kill the fungi and pests that blight our gardens. This penny-wise solution is pound-foolish, because dish soap is not true horticultural soap and it can leave residues that harm plants. Such treatment also is indiscriminate: good bugs die with bad when you blitzkrieg a garden this way.

I have learned to mix a soapy martini for this problem, and I advise applying it at dawn, so the soap mixture can dry before the sun grows strong.

Begin with a real horticultural soap. These can be purchased pre-mixed, but I prefer to buy concentrate (look for Concern or similar brands in garden shops). Gardens Alive, a favorite site for reasonably priced organic products <<http://www.gardensalive.com>> sells Soap-Shield, a product that, at \$14 per pint, will make about 16 gallons of soap-spray. Unlike some other brands that contain copper, this soap breaks down more easily into compounds healthy for your soil. I find that in our garden a pre-mixed gallon lasts more than a year.

Gardens Alive claims that Soap-Shield is a complete product. If you try another brand that is only soap, stir or shake up my anti-fungal martini:

- ❖ 1 gallon water
- ❖ 1 teaspoon soap
- ❖ 1 teaspoon horticultural oil (sold under the Concern and other brand-names)
- ❖ 1 teaspoon baking soda

A Google search will reveal many other formulas, many of them using bleach, something I avoid. My martini-mix includes oil to help the solution stay on the plants a while, even after a rain. I reapply the martini a few days in a row, then watch carefully. Note that helpful insects will be killed, but at least the harm caused is limited to single plants. If you see a Mantis or other garden predator, try to move it away before spraying.

Souse both the tops and bottoms of leaves with the spray before first light. If you do this when the sun is up, the plants may be scorched by the sun's rays (magnified by the wet soap like tiny magnifying glasses!) or if you do this at dusk, the wetting may actually encourage mildew!

So get up early a few days in a row, smell the coffee, and give your plants a martini. In the cool of the day pour your own favorite drink and, from a nook in the garden, enjoy your work. Bright Blessings from the Sacred Garden!

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