

Organic Control of Whitefly on Brassicas

Healthy soil: The first line of attack is to create a healthy soil, which will produce strong, vigorous plant growth. Plants are then much more able to withstand a pest attack.

Do not panic: Assuming your plants are in a healthy soil, and not short of water, they can tolerate quite high populations of this pest.

Sensible feeding: Do not over feed plants with manure or other nitrogen rich fertilisers, as this will encourage soft leafy growth favoured by the pest.

Cultural control: Dig up all winter brassicas as soon as cropping is finished and bury the plants in a trench or in the compost heap. Do this before planting out new brassicas in the spring.

Encourage a natural balance: Help nature to help you by planting attractant flowers. Simple flowers such as fennel, cow parsley, lovage and other members of the Umbellifera and Asteraceae (Compositae) families will attract parasitic wasps such as *Aphelinus*. These insects lay eggs inside the whitefly scales and their larvae consume them from the inside out. In this way the life cycle of the whitefly is broken. *Phacelia tanacetifolia* is also an attractant for *Aphelinus* and is a good green manure and also cut flower. Lacewings, predators which feed on whitefly, are attracted by members of the Asteraceae (Compositae) family such as Yarrow and the Shasta Daisy.

Hand picking: Whitefly eggs are laid on the underside of lower leaves. Remove infected leaves before the immobile young whitefly 'scales' turn into adults. A battery-powered vacuum can be used to suck up the adults. Walking through your crop regularly will disturb the adults and disrupt their feeding patterns.

Hosing down: A good jet of water can wash off whitefly, honeydew and sooty mould.

Chemical control - a last resort: Insecticidal soap. The spray must hit the pests directly to be effective so it is best applied when the adults are not so active when temperatures are low (e.g. early morning). Spray under the leaves, using a good quality sprayer. Spraying once a week for 3-4 weeks may be necessary to see a significant effect.