

The content of this article 'Fruit gardening: What can I prune right now?' was prepared by [The University of Minnesota Extension](#) and has been revised and republished by FreshFruitPortal.com.

For the latest information, check the [University of Minnesota's website here](#).

Many insect problems on indoor plants can be managed using nonchemical methods, particularly if the infestation is minor.



Carefully scrape scale without damaging the stem

Washing

- Wipe leaves with a damp paper towel, changing towels often to prevent spread.
- Spray small plants in a sink.
- Spray large plants in a shower.

Physically remove pests

- Handpick large pests such as [earwigs](#), caterpillars, [slugs](#) and [millipedes](#).
- Small numbers of scale insects can be removed using a fingernail file or something similar.
- Mealybugs can be removed using tweezers or a cotton swab dipped in alcohol.
- Some pests can be removed using a forceful spray of water.

- Repot with new potting soil to eliminate soil-borne pests. Use clean pots and wash soil off plant roots.



Remove mealybugs with a swab dipped in alcohol

Pruning

- Prune if a pest issue is isolated to a few leaves, stems or branches.
- When infestations are more widespread, prune the most severely infested plant parts. This makes it easier to manage pests on the remaining plant.
- In the case of severe infestations and depending on the type of plant, cutting it back may help eliminate pests.
- Watch new growth for signs of infestation.

Throw away or compost plant

- Necessary and economical if the plant is heavily infested and badly damaged.
- Avoids exposing other plants to the same pest problem.

Using pesticides for pest management

If you still have an insect problem after trying nonchemical methods, consider using a pesticide. There are a limited number of products available for indoor plants. They are sold at plant nurseries, garden centers, building supply stores and online.

They should contain one of the following active ingredients:

Pyrethrins

- No residual activity, must directly spray the insect to kill it.
- Effective against [mealybugs](#), [whiteflies](#), [scales](#), [thrips](#), [aphids](#).
- Repeat applications usually necessary.

Potassium fatty acids (i.e. insecticidal soap)

- Sold specifically as an insecticide.
- Do not mix homemade soap products as this can burn plants.
- No residual activity, must directly spray the insect to kill it.
- Kills insects by smothering.
- Repeat applications are usually necessary.
- Effective against scales, aphids, thrips, [spider mites](#), whiteflies.

Plant oil extracts

(canola, clove, sesame, cottonseed, garlic oils)

- Only kills when sprays cover the insects.
- Kills when insects are smothered.
- Repeat applications are usually necessary.
- Effective against scales, thrips, aphids, whiteflies, spider mites.

Neem oil

- Disrupts insect growth.
- Short to medium residual activity, lasts days or weeks.
- Repeat applications are usually necessary.
- Effective against whiteflies, thrips, aphids.

***Bacillus thuringiensis*, subspecies *israelensis*, strain AM 65-52**

(e.g. Knock Out Gnats)

- Applied to the soil.
- Bacteria that specifically attack fungus gnat larvae.
- Not effective against fungus gnat adults.

- Available primarily online.

Imidacloprid

- Systemic, i.e. taken up and moved throughout the plant.
- Long residual activity, lasts months.
- **CAUTION:** Toxic to bees; do not use on bee attractive plants that are set outside during the summer.
- Effective against mealybugs, soft scales, aphids, whiteflies.

Precautions:

- Be sure the plant you are treating is listed on the product label.
- If you use a product that requires to be diluted with water, mix only as much as you expect to use in one day. Be sure to use it that day.
- Apply chemicals outdoors whenever possible.
- In cold weather, spray plants indoors in a well-ventilated area.
 - To prevent secondary exposure from pesticides, enclose your plant in a plastic bag and seal shut.
 - Cut a small hole in the side of the bag and insert your spray nozzle.
 - Move the nozzle around to spray your plant thoroughly, especially under the leaves.
 - Remove the spray nozzle and quickly cover the hole with duct tape.
 - Keep it out of direct sun till dry after treatment.
- Never use any pesticide on a plant that is moisture-stressed. Water the soil a day or two before applying pesticides.

CAUTION: Mention of a pesticide or use of a pesticide label is for educational purposes only. Always follow the pesticide label directions attached to the pesticide container you are using. Remember, the label is the law.

Source: [University of Minnesota Extension](#)