



Celebrating 22 Years!

ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

EMAIL OR MAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:
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QUESTION THIS WEEK:

I keep a bay plant in a pot in my kitchen to use for cooking, but lately the leaves have become very sticky. I had aphids on another plant inside, but I got rid of that plant. What could be causing sticky bay leaves, and how do I fix it? -Emily

Linda's Answer:

Dear Emily,

It sounds like you have one of two possible problems: the aphids from that one other plant defecated all over your bay plant, or you have psyllids on your bay. Psyllids are tiny, sap-sucking insects that secrete a sticky honeydew substance just like aphids. You should check your bay leaves in the sunlight, both the top side and underside of each leaf, as well as the stem. If you see any evidence of these tiny insects or their dry exoskeletons, you should plan on spraying your plant with Neem Oil, an organic pesticide that should kill them off within a few days. Neem oil works by inhibiting the insects' ability to eat, and is fairly easy to find at most garden centers. If you have a very small plant, you may also be able to soak a cotton ball in rubbing alcohol and gently clean both sides of each leaf. This will kill the small bugs already on the leaves, hinder future insects' desire to eat the plant, and will also clean the sticky stuff off the leaves. Then you will want to wash the leaves gently with water, or at least do so between the time you harvest them and the time you use them in your cooking.



Another good method that will help control insects on your bay plant is to keep it trimmed so that the branches are separated enough to allow good air flow around the leaves. Keep your bay plant in a sunny window in the colder months, or on your porch outside on warm summer days. A little time outside will also allow your plant to benefit from visits from predatory insects that can help take care of your pest problem. Good luck!

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 22 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

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