

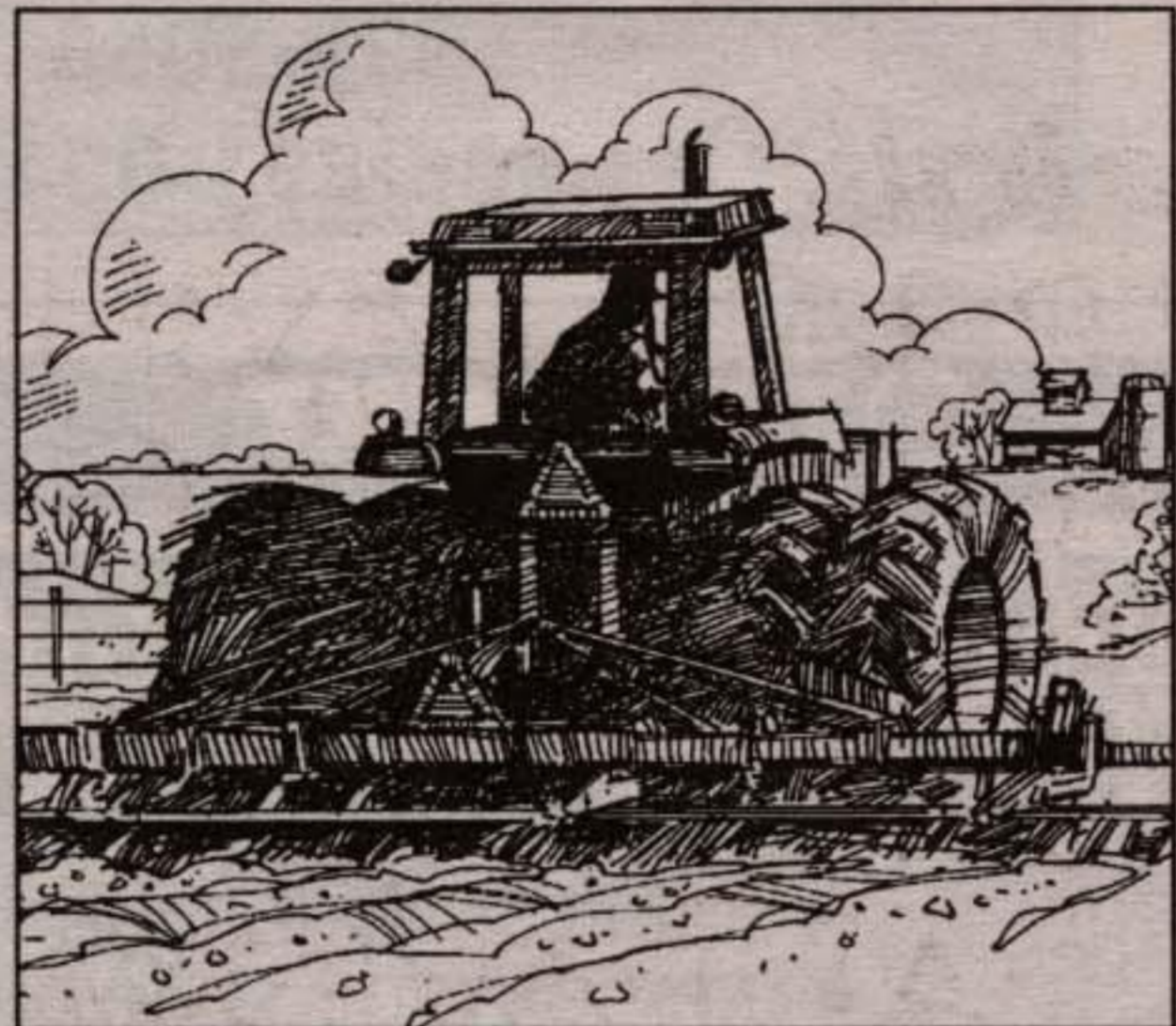
# Preventative maintenance is the key to avoiding spring planting accidents on the farm

Getting machinery ready for spring planting before the season begins makes safety sense. Lack of planning and equipment breakdown can increase downtime in the field. This, in turn, can lead to undue rushing, a factor that can contribute to farm accidents.

Preventive maintenance is the key to maximum productivity and safe machine operation. Safety-conscious growers recommend following a maintenance program for every piece of farm equipment.

Following is a safety checklist that can be used to train farm workers and reduce the risk of injury:

1. Equipment operators should read the operator's manual and follow operating maintenance and safety recommendations.
2. Make all necessary repairs and replace worn or broken parts.
3. Clean, lubricate and adjust the machinery before starting the workday. Fill the fuel tank in the



evening.

4. Sharpen cutting edges.
5. Make sure all shields and guards are on the machines before starting the equipment. Do not open doors or shields until all rotating parts have stopped. This could be several minutes after the power is shut off.
6. Place solid blocks under hydraulically raised equipment when working around or under it. Do not disconnect hydraulics when equipment is raised.
7. Shut down the machine and the engine to free plugged material from the equipment; use tools or hands protected by heavy gloves.
8. Be prepared for fires; equip every piece of powered machinery with a fire extinguisher.
9. Wear well-fitting clothes.
10. Keep everyone not involved in the operation away from equipment in the field.

—Canada Safety Council

# Profiling houseplant pests

Thrips, and mealybugs are two trouble-some pests houseplant owners encounter. How can you help your plants retaliate? Start by reading the following article which outlines the best ways to deal with these houseplant pests.

## Thrips

Thrips are very tiny insects (0.5 to 2.0 mm) and hide in out-of-the-way places during the day. There are hundreds of species of thrips, and at least five attack houseplants. One of the most common is the flower thrips (thrips, by the way, is both singular and plural) which cause damage to flowers and buds. In minor infestations, the only sign of damage may be some slight, silvery markings on the petals caused by the rasping tongue of this insect. In severe cases, the flowers will be small, discoloured and malformed. Flower thrips may be found on African violets, azaleas, begonias, cyclamens and fuschias.

Thrips are susceptible to insecticides only during the adult and larva phases. This means that any treatment must be repeated at least four times at five-day intervals in order to be fully effective. Always use hot water when mixing sprays, as by the time cool or even tepid water has reached the plant's surface, it may have become cold enough to do damage.

The first step in treating thrips is to remove all their favourite hiding spots, such as flowers and buds and severely damaged leaves. Unless this is done, chances of success are slim. Thrips are becoming increasingly resistant to

insecticides. One good way of getting around this problem is to spray alternately with different insecticides rather than always using the same one. Those who prefer pesticides that are nontoxic to humans and pets will find insecticidal soap quite effective, especially if the plants are dipped into a weak solution of it (using tepid water) rather than sprayed.

## Mealybugs

Mealybugs are quite common and indeed hard to control. These small cottony insects work their way into leaf axils, unopened leaves and other hard-to-reach places and are therefore difficult to control using pesticide treatments.

To eliminate them for good, start by thoroughly cleaning, with a diluted bleach solution, the area around the infested plants, pots, saucers, shelves, nearby walls, etc. Otherwise, mealybugs can remain hidden for months, leading to renewed infestations long after the original one has subsided. Spray each plant with insecticidal soap, or better yet, turn it upside down and plunge the foliage and stems into the soap solution. This ensures that all mealybugs will be touched.

Rubbing alcohol sprayed on the leaves and stems is also an excellent treatment but should only be used with adequate ventilation. Repeat the same step every five days for a month. Soil mealybugs are more difficult to eradicate, but dipping the roots into an alcohol solution, and repeating if necessary, is often effective.

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