



Pest Corner

April, 2007

Spring start has been a soggy one here at the coast. In spite of the rain, there are plenty of signs of warmer weather as evidenced by the flurry of activity in the air and at soil level.

On March 24th, I saw some small winged and green "insects" flying and hopping over the chard and beet greens (over wintered from last season and growing again). I think these are the winged form of aphids...then I also saw some cute lady beetles nearby! For the time being, I will let them sort matters out... and see if my natural predators take care of the green winged menace.

To learn more about what we can do to discourage insects besides using insecticides, read below from the March 26, 2007 article by Don Tapio, GH County Extension Agent.

TIPS FOR REDUCING GARDEN INSECT PESTS NATURALLY

Most plants produce defensive chemicals that help fend off insects and diseases. These chemicals may be insect poisons, feeding deterrents or have fungicidal properties. The roots of some French and African marigolds, for example, contain a substance that is toxic to certain types of nematodes.

Nematodes are soil-inhabiting microscopic roundworms that damage many species of plants. Certain nematodes can be eliminated from a site by growing a thick crop of marigolds for one season prior to planting the vegetable or fruit crop. In order to be effective, the stems and leaves of the marigolds must be tilled into the soil prior to planting in order for the nematode toxins to be released as the foliage decays. Simply planting marigolds adjacent to desirable garden crops has very limited, if any, effectiveness in reducing nematode populations.

Destructive insects often locate their food by smell. Many plants, especially culinary herbs, produce strong scents that may confuse insect pests looking for a host to feed on. Garden vegetable plants such as garlic, onions, chives, and herbs such as catnip, horehound, wormwood, basil, tansy, and mints all produce scents that seem to repel insects or mask the scents which attract insects. A certain level of insect protection may be achieved by carefully inter planting some of these "aromatics" as companions to vegetables.

Many insect pests have specific food preferences while others feed on a wide assortment of hosts. Even those species that feed on a wide variety of hosts, such as Japanese beetles, have preferences for certain plants. It is possible to plant a preferred host as a trap crop near the plant we wish to protect. Once the insects have settled on the “trap” crop, they can be killed periodically by spraying without having to treat the protected plants.

Some insects are helpful because they eat or parasitize harmful insects. Most species of wasps and spiders are beneficial. Also are ground beetles, praying mantids, lady bugs, pirate bugs, and several species of flies. It is possible to attract beneficial insects by planting flowers near the garden. Some of these plants are: Dill, parsley, carrot, coriander, angelica, and parsnip. These plants feature flat topped clusters of small flowers that have strong fragrances. They also seem to attract large numbers of beneficial insects, particularly predatory wasps and flies. This characteristic makes them good candidates for companion planting.

Home gardeners can use a very easy practice to reduce insect problems by avoiding monocultures of plants in terms of space and time. A one-hundred foot long row of broccoli presents a large target for a cabbage moth that is flying by, but the same number of cabbage plants scattered over several thousand square feet, and interplanted with other crops, is less obvious and attractive to the insect. Pests which routinely plague large commercial plantings of crops may never be a problem in the diversified home garden.

Allow parsley, carrot and celery to remain in the ground over the winter. They will produce flowers the second season and attract beneficial insects. Plant strongly scented herbs among vegetable crops.

Learning to recognize beneficial insects as well as pests, and noting which plants are attractive to beneficial insects, will have a major impact on reducing overall insect damage. WSU entomologists continue to emphasize that less than 1% of insect pests are garden pests!