

Biological Warfare Against Pests

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Every day customers come into the nursery with pest problems. "What should I do about this?" they want to know. Frankly, the best answer is often, "nothing". Every healthy garden has pests. They are food for your population of beneficial insects. Without them, your beneficials will starve to death or move to your neighbor's yard. You will discover just how serious a pest problem can be if you are ever unlucky enough to lose your beneficial population, which is often the result of using too many chemicals. So when you see a few holes in leaves, practice saying to yourself, "Oh good, there's food for my beneficials".

Some plants are a magnet for certain pests, however. Gardenias and whiteflies come to mind. If you do not control the insects, you may well lose them. My favorite solution is usually to remove those plants from the landscape. But if you are one of those gardeners that just has to have a gardenia, there are organic solutions that will not harm your beneficials. Here are some of my favorites. Let's start with the one that will help you with that gardenia.

My favorite organic treatment for hard-to-treat pests, such as whiteflies, spider-mites and scales, is neem oil. Neem comes from the tropical neem tree of India. It has been used there for thousands of years as a natural pesticide, is safe for use on herbs and vegetables, and will not harm your beneficials if you use it as directed on the label for systemic action and not as a spray.

During certain years, sod webworms can be a major lawn problem in late summer or early fall, but there is a natural organic solution. *Bacillus thuringiensis* is a bacterium, packaged as an insecticide, that will only kill the caterpillars in the grass and not all the other beneficial insects.

For those of you who have the delightful problem of deer eating your plants, there is a wonderful new long lasting product. I admit I have no personal experience with it. I will never see a deer on my property unless I have it shipped there in a cage. And I moved here a few years ago from a city where a deer eating your landscape plants would warrant a story in the local newspaper. I feel completely comfortable recommending Plant Pro-Tec, however, because customers are raving about it. There are other products that work; but you have to keep reapplying them. It gets very tedious and very expensive in a hurry. Plant Pro-Tec is a slow release garlic stick, which can be clipped to your trees or shrubs or inserted into the ground among your annuals. According to customers who have been pulling their hair out over the destruction caused by these dears for years, it really does last for a whole season or more.

So remember, when you have a pest problem, it is not necessary to reach for heavy chemicals. There are solutions that will not harm your beneficials, local wildlife, or your family. But, follow the directions on the labels of these products just as you should with any pesticide.

So sit down, chill out, and enjoy the beauty, scents and wildlife of your garden. It's so much more satisfying than waging a constant war on pests. Let organic solutions and your beneficials

do that for you.

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