

Organic Pest Control

Diagnosis

Diagnosing a pest problem on a plant is easiest if you catch the pests in the act. Identifying the pest takes patience. Walk through your garden, or look carefully at your houseplants weekly and record your observations. Use the information gathered to narrow down the possible causes, using handbooks on pest control.

Pest Control

Pest problems concern every gardener. Maintaining a beautiful garden is possible without exterminating every insect. Encouraging a diversity of predators is one way of managing the garden; these predators are beneficial. They include spiders, ladybugs, assassin bugs and birds.

Companion Planting

One weapon is companion planting. Marigolds planted near tomatoes and roses greatly reduce attacks by aphids. Beans and potatoes make great garden mates; the beans dispel Colorado potato beetles while the potatoes repel Mexican bean beetles. Herbs repel insects; pests simply don't swarm or nibble on their strongly scented leaves. Basil helps the tomato overcome both insects and disease. Mints such as spearmint, or apple mint keep pests from the cabbage family: broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts.

Common Pests

Aphids cover the plant in a sticky cluster and cause leaves, buds or stems to distort. Aphids attack flowering bulbs and suck plant sap, causing the blossoms and leaves to drop off. Wash the aphids from the plant with a strong

spray of garlic water, and repeat as needed. You can also dust the aphids with pyrethrin, which can be found in garden centers.

Spider mites cause stippled yellow leaves and webbing. They are tiny, spider-like pests that feed on the undersides of leaves. They suck sap, causing discoloration. Spray with garlic water two or three times a day, removing insects or eggs. For severe infestations, spray plants with insecticidal soap.

Slugs and snails create large holes in leaves, stems and bulbs. These creatures differ only by the presence or absence of a hard shell. Mulch provides a shady place for them since they are nocturnal. Because snails and slugs travel along the ground, you can deter them by creating a barrier with materials such as wood ashes, cedar sawdust and diatomaceous earth (an organic insecticide), encircling your plant or garden bed. You could also hand pick them or sprinkle them with table salt.

Prevention

A way to avoid pests or diseases is to know your plant and provide it with adequate conditions specific to that plant. Proper soil is the foundation for growing healthy plants. Providing adequate fertilizer will help enhance their natural resistance.

Recommended Readings

Ellis and Bradley. *Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control*.

Mike McGrath. *Organic Gardening*.

Andrea Hall, Class of 2004

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery

Niagara-on-the-Lake Campus, 135 Taylor Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON L0S 1J0
phone: (905) 641-2252, ext. 4082; fax: (905) 988-4307 e-mail: mnewell@niagaracollege.ca
Website: <http://greenhousenursery.niagaracollege.ca>