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1-1-2002

How Can I Rid My Yard Of Pests This Time Of Year?

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Recommended Citation
Alston, Diane G., "How Can I Rid My Yard Of Pests This Time Of Year?" (2002). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 385.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/385

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Utah State University Extension
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A weekly question/answer column

How Can I Rid My Yard of Pests This Time Of Year?

Diane G. Alston answers:*

Aphids, squash bugs, Colorado potato beetles, Mexican bean beetles, spider mites and nematodes are just a few pests that are anxious to find a cozy place to spend the winter. If you take action now to rid them from your yard and garden, you will have a jump on pest management next spring. Here are some things you can do:

- Remove any herbaceous (annual) plant material at the end of the season. Be sure not to leave old vines, plants, and annual flowers in a debris pile. Compost or dispose of the plant materials as soon as possible. The longer you leave them around, the longer many pests have to find a safe place to spend the winter.
- Rototill your garden soil. This destroys many pests that plan to overwinter by bringing them to the surface where they will freeze or dessicate.
- Prune any diseased or dead limbs from woody shrubs and trees in winter or early spring. Wait until trees and shrubs have hardened off for the winter before pruning. Fall pruning may predispose some plants to winter injury. Late winter to early spring is usually the best time to prune in Northern Utah.
- Protect shrubs and other plants with winter-sensitive roots and crowns such as roses, blackberries and grapes. Place leaves, grass clippings or other types of mulch around the base. Winter injury will cause stress and reduced growth for cold susceptible plants next spring. This in turn tends to make these plants more prone to attack by pests.
- Continue to water your perennial plants through the fall. Although their growth is slowing down and less water is needed, a water-stressed plant or tree is more vulnerable to winter injury.
- Plan now for next year by keeping a record of the plants you liked best, those with the fewest pest problems, and pest problems that should be addressed next spring with dormant sprays.

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* Diane G. Alston is Utah State University Extension Entomologist