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Insecticides: Ask Questions First, Shoot Later

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GARDEN NOTES

INSECTICIDES: ASK QUESTIONS FIRST, SHOOT LATER

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Unfortunately the beneficial insects don't wear tiny orange hats and vests so they often get killed along with the nasty ones.

"Although it sounds crazy, many people, once they see a problem, grab the nearest can of poison and start to spray," says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. "This is like being ill, skipping the doctor visit, going straight to the pharmacist, and asking for any bottle off the shelf. As long as it's medicine, it should cure me, right?"

While venturing through the garden or landscape, if you come upon a plant that looks sick or has a congregation of bugs on it, don't panic and grab the nearest can of chemicals, Goodspeed suggests. The first thing to do is get the problem identified. Take the infested plant part into your local nursery, look it up in a book or bring it into one of the Extension offices.

Once the insect, disease or weed is identified, you can make some wise decisions on how to control the problem, he says. Take the time to find out the life cycle of the pest, what plants it affects, and how much damage it can do. Some pests are simply a nuisance while others can destroy an entire orchard.

"I really believe that we need to be a little more tolerant of some insects and diseases, and look for different control options before we spray," Goodspeed says. "I once heard of someone who sprayed a whole bottle of chemical over a garden to kill three or four squash bugs. The sad part is that the squash bugs survived the drenching."

Most insects actually cause little, if any, damage, he says. For those that are really bad and cause some serious problems, first consider cultural, mechanical or biological controls before spraying or dusting. Those squash bugs could have been picked off and, like their name indicates, squashed.

Another option is to prevent the insects from multiplying or control them while the problem is small, Goodspeed adds. A great control for aphids, scale and mites on fruit trees is to apply a dormant oil to the tree right before it flowers or leafs out (just as you see color on the tip

of the buds). This can reduce or eliminate the need to spray for the insects throughout the growing season.

"Another good practice is to keep the plants as healthy and clean as possible," he says. "Weeds and debris are not only ugly, but also act as a convenient motel for unwanted insects and slugs. They hang out under the leaves and rubble during the day, and then at night they mosey over to the garden for dinner."

Many of our diseases are only a problem when we or Mother Nature over-water, Goodspeed says. By watering deeply and infrequently, many of the disease problems that invade our landscapes and gardens can be avoided.

As the year progresses, keep an eye out for different critters and other problems, he says. When you see a problem, get it identified, and then decide what should be done. This will save you some money, and you'll become a wiser gardener.

For more information, contact your local **USU County Extension office.**

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