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1-1-2000

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Recommended Citation
Hinkamp, Dennis, "Alternate Forms of pest Execution" (2000). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 915.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/915

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GARDEN NOTES

ALTERNATE FORMS OF PEST EXECUTION

By Dennis Hinkamp

October 2000 Fall-02

Capital punishment is still favored by most homeowners when it comes to protecting their gardens, but many gardeners are seeking more natural forms of execution.

"I am fascinated with some of the recipes people create to control pests in the garden and landscape," says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. "Someone once asked me how much tabasco sauce to put in the spray tank for mites. Heck, I didn't even know mites liked spicy food."

I definitely am an advocate for using every means available to control pests before grabbing pesticides, he says. However, trying to decide what actually works and what doesn't is difficult. The best way to make the decision is to do a little research. Try a product on one or two plants and leave a couple untreated. The untreated, or control, plants allow you to compare the effectiveness of the brew.

"Some of the best pest control options are not potions at all, but mechanical or physical barriers that keep pests away from the plants," Goodspeed says. "A good example is a garden blanket or row cover put over cole crops to protect them from larvae (worms). The adult moths of some larva like to lay their eggs on these particular vegetables. Garden blankets act as a physical barrier which protects cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli."

Another physical barrier is spraying Tanglefoot, or another sticky substance around the lower trunk of peach or other fruit trees, he says. Getting stuck in the goo as they climb the tree keeps earwigs out of the fruit. Its drawback is that it must be reapplied every week or two.

"Mechanical control of insects is one of my favorite methods," he says. "This usually means hand removal or squishing the insects. Unfortunately this is difficult with insects as small as mites or even aphids. But, it works well on aptly-named squash bugs, potato beetles, tomato horned worms and other medium-sized insects."

A good control for slugs and snails is to place a board in the garden at night, then turn it over the next morning to expose the unwanted visitors, Goodspeed suggests. These slimy creatures, looking for a place to hide from the sun, mistake the underside of the board as a likely spot. They can then be smashed and placed in the garbage can. For those who are a little squeamish, invite a neighbor boy who actually enjoys crunching snails to come over and help you

eradicate them.

Another mechanical control is simply removing the affected part of the plant, he adds. Tent caterpillars can be effectively controlled with pruning. They normally are found on one small limb or branch that can easily be removed and tossed in the garbage. Other pests that can be pruned out include fire blight, small amounts of powdery mildew, smut on sweet corn and cane borers in raspberries.

Soft bodied insects such as mites and aphids can be controlled by suffocation, Goodspeed says. A good insecticidal soap available at most nurseries and garden centers can be safely sprayed directly on the critters. It covers the insects bodies blocking their spiracles which are used to take in air.

"A good hard stream of water is another effective way to reduce mite populations and damage," he says. "This works especially well on dwarf Alberta spruce and other evergreens. The water knocks them off the plant, then, if life is fair, they are eaten or lose their way back to the plant."

Sometimes the best control is simply patience and a little tolerance, Goodspeed says. Monitor the garden and landscape regularly and, if a problem arises, try different approaches before grabbing the can of insecticide. Don't be afraid to do some experimenting, but keep in mind it is often simple, common sense control measures that actually work.

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

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/10/2000/DF)