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1-1-1998

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Recommended Citation
Hinkamp, Dennis, "Utah's Pest Peeves" (1998). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 967.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/967

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Utah State University Extension
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GARDEN NOTES

UTAH'S PEST PEEVES

By Dennis Hinkamp

December 1998 General-06

The same climate that gives Utah "the greatest snow on Earth" makes Utah an inhospitable vacation destination for many of the garden pests that plague the rest of the country.

"I have gained a greater appreciation for living and gardening in Utah," says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist, after spending a week on the East Coast with 20 other Extension agents from around the country. We visited gardens, greenhouses, lawn care companies and other horticulture related sites. I learned about insects and diseases I didn't even know existed. Most of them (thankfully) are unaware that Utah even exists and are too wimpy to endure our cold winters."

The tour was sponsored by RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) and the NACAA (National Association of County Agricultural Agents), Goodspeed says. It is awarded annually as recognition of agents who "develop programs and activities that enhance the protection of the environment when pesticides are used in urban areas."

When compared with other areas of the country we have relatively few pests in the Intermountain area, he emphasizes. However, we are still bothered by a few hardy critters that can be devastating to a garden, landscape, or home. Some of them damage lawns, trees, and other ornamentals, while others invade homes, are a general nuisance, pose health risks, or destroy wooden structures if left unchecked.

"Insects, diseases, and other pests have always been a problem," Goodspeed says. "In recent years we have developed many alternatives for controlling these pests. Options such as growing resistant varieties, using natural predators and parasites, applying mechanical measures and using pesticides properly have greatly helped reduce pest populations. Combining the methods available for pest control is known as integrated pest management (IPM)."

Integrated Pest Management incorporates all our technologies and advances for controlling pests, he explains. An example is controlling aphids in fruit trees. Applying a delayed dormant oil spray in the spring kills the overwintering eggs and populations are reduced. Lady beetles and green lace wings are then set out in the orchard to control any survivors.

After the "good guy" insects move to the neighbor's yard and the aphids return, a spray of insecticidal soap can knock them back, Goodspeed adds. If the aphids are still winning the battle,

there are a handful of specialized insecticides that can be sprayed in the bad areas to give us the upper hand in the war. Using all the options together keeps the environment clean and reduces the pest problems.

"There are many pest problems that we simply tolerate," Goodspeed says. "Tolerance of some insects is also a part of the IPM approach. A few box elder bugs pose no health or crop loss threat. They are a real nuisance and make lousy house guests, but a pesticide spray may do more harm than good."

A few termites in the house is a different situation, he says. They can be a threat to the structural integrity of the house and have never learned to clean up after themselves. Control measures are recommended and essential to maintain the secure feeling that the house isn't going to collapse in the middle of the night.

When dealing with pests whether in the garden, home or berry patch, it is important to get proper identification before applying any control measures, Goodspeed says. Once correct identification is made, determine which options are available for best control. Tolerance might be the best option.

If you are unsure of your choices, there are many people available to give advice and provide consultations, he says. Licensed and certified pest control operators, certified nursery men and women, certified arborists and USU Extension agents can help identify problems and give different options for control.

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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/12/1998/DF)