



GARDEN PESTS

Tips for keeping unhelpful insect and animal pests out of the garden



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In our gardens, there are good bugs and bad bugs. And while we don't want to kill insects that are beneficial, we also want to avoid those that look at our carefully nurtured plants as a smorgasbord.

"First identify what you're dealing with--scale, mealy bugs, spring tails, spider mites or whatever," says Carol A. Prybell, Porter County

Master Gardener. "Sometimes a magnifying glass is helpful and then, of course, there's our good friend: Google Search. After inserting whatever insect you think may be the culprit, click on Images to be sure. If you are unable to make an identification on your own, place a sample in a closed container and bring it to the Porter County Extension Office in the County Administration Building at 155 Indiana Avenue in Valparaiso for help. Knowing what you're dealing with will help you form a plan of attack."

Chuck Ross, owner of Chesterton Feed & Garden in Chesterton, says that currently one of the bad bugs out there are squash vine borers, a common type of moth that can cause serious damage to vine crops such as summer and winter squashes, pumpkins and even cucumbers, zucchini and melons. The insects wreak havoc by laying eggs at the base of a plant which within about a week, hatch and bore (hence the name) into the stems to feed, blocking the flow of water to the rest of the plant.

"We use a granular ground treatment to protect the plant before the vine borers can get into in it," says Ross.

Stink bugs are a common problem this time of year as well. Worldwide there are about 4,700 species of stink bugs so we may be lucky that there are only about 250 types in the U.S. and Canada. Though the bugs are basically harmless, stink bugs do live up to their name, if you squash them, says Ross, the aroma is unpleasant aroma.

"They come into homes in the fall and then starting in May when it gets warm, they try to work their way outside," he says. "They're sizable bugs but there are ways to get rid of them."

Cuter than bugs, deer and rabbits can also ruin a garden when they go on midnight feeding

frenzies.

“To protect hosta and lilies, I use the barrier method using unconventional barriers,” says Prybell. “Because animals never attack the common hostas, just my prized ones, I keep a few bird cages found at garage sales or resale shops to protect those that are vulnerable.”

Prybell also uses another barrier approach to protect her lily buds which she warns isn’t the most attractive but is effective.

“After losing many buds to browsing deer a few years ago, I had a brainstorm while opening a bag of oranges,” she says. “Why not save the bag and put it over the lily bud? It works. I leave these bags on the plant until later in the season when the deer have moved on to other delicacies. This is not necessarily a pretty sight but then neither is a flowerless lily.”

Ross says many different products are sold to ward off bad bunnies and determined deer including one product containing coyote urine.

“Deer take a smell of that and think there are coyotes around and won’t go near the garden,” he says noting some deterrents shouldn’t be used on edible plants. “We also have organic products which repel by smell.”

With all the wet weather and temperatures finally climbing into something resembling summer, Ross says mildew and fungus will be an issue as well.

“That you can prevent from happening,” he says. “You can start putting something systemic on now. But not on edibles. For that you have to use other products.”

Ross recommends bringing in a leaf or piece of the plant for identifying pests.

“Put it in a Ziploc bag and seal it up before coming in,” he cautions, “so you’re pest doesn’t become our pest.”