



Tucson
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Gardeners

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Take Control Of Your Garden

Controlling garden pests needn't take any more effort than fighting those in the house. Pests can't be built out of a garden as out of a house, but some of the techniques work. Good sanitation and mechanical barriers can be effective. Avoid planting large stretches of one plant or shrub. Instead plant with colorful profusion of different flowers and shrubs. Time the planting and harvesting of vegetables to avoid their insect pests. The best aids are wildlife allies—birds, lizards, bats, toads, predatory insects—who feed on all insect stages. One of the biggest drawbacks of chemical pesticides is that they kill friend and foe alike. A classic example is the surge in spider mites. Once they were minor troublemakers, now they are elevated to the status of a worldwide threat to forest and agriculture.

Trap Them, Barricade Them, Repel Them

If you know what a specific pest likes to eat, you can set up a trap that is harmless to humans and pets. A simple trap baited with meat or syrup can kill hundreds of flies a week. A small jar half filled with beer finishes off cockroaches by the dozen. Silverfish can be done in with a trap partly filled with flour. Set the last two traps where the insects usually crawl. A snail or slug can't inch past sawdust. Caterpillars can't negotiate a band of hay girdling a tree. Petroleum jelly stops ants dead in their tracks. By thinking along the same lines, come up with solutions as simple and effective as these.

Herbal Remedies

Use herbs to repel unwanted wildlife. Insects have keen senses of smell and avoid sharp scents like mint, tansy, and basil. Incidentally, camphor has recently been found to be highly toxic to children, so avoid it. In Gainesville, Florida, the United States Dept of Agriculture's Insect Repellent and Attractant Project has been testing between 300 and 500 herbal derivatives since 1942. Oil of spearmint, oil of pennyroyal and oil of citronella show great promise. However many oils can cause skin rashes, so one must test before using on the body. Herbals cannot protect a large space or have long-distance effectiveness. Chemicals are too expensive for widespread use in India, so work on herbals as repellents is constantly being evaluated. The final word: Don't expect miraculous or immediate results, but acceptable control can be achieved.

BUGBUSTERS by Bernice Lifton, 1991, Avery Publishing Group, Inc, Garden City Park, NY

Walking thorough the isles of a nursery or a hardware store where all the pesticides are lined up for sale can be a stinky stroll. A chemist once said, "If you can smell it, it will probably do some harm." Some of our worst pests are now resistant to nearly all chemical killers. Hundreds are immune to at least some pesticides. Our ancestors knew how to get rid of all sorts of unwanted wildlife, inside and out, without poisons. Cleanliness and sunlight are two of the most powerful weapons. Other methods are often not much more complicated. Best of all, pests cannot become immune to these safe, effective techniques. In today's enthusiasm for instant solutions, we tend to ignore safe, somewhat slower methods. When houses were built, the insects were displaced. WE are the intruders, because they had to find new homes. One of the things we need to accept is this is a war that humans can't win—there are just too many insects. So the basic strategy is this: Find out HOW the insects are getting in, WHERE they are finding food and water, and WHAT conditions will drive them back outside. A tightly built, well-maintained home is essential in any pest-control campaign. Most pests need only a tiny fraction of an inch to establish themselves in your home. Check the landscaping around the house: does any of it make an easy entrance? Next on the list, starve out the raiders. The strongest weapons are cleanliness and proper food storage. Regularly vacuum all areas of the house to pick any lint, stray food crumbs, tiny bits of soap (in laundry or bath area). Clean out the clutter where insects may hide. Frequently airing an sunning rooms makes pests feel unwelcome.