Choose Resistant Plants

Many plant varieties have been selected and bred for resistance to insect and disease pests. Use pest-resistant plants whenever possible. Remember that a healthy plant is less susceptible to pests. Selecting the proper USDA Hardiness Zone species and locating plants in proper sites can help prevent pest problems. Native plants are well suited to local soil and climate and often have fewer pest problems in their native setting.

Prevent Pests Before They Spread

Keep your yard clean. Remove diseased plant debris and weeds that often harbor insect pests. Look for pests or signs of damage and remove the source of the problem before it can spread to other plants. Sanitation can be the key to managing pests. Finding and eliminating infected plant parts can keep plant diseases to a minimum. Diseases can be spread by garden implements. Cleaning tools and washing hands can prevent the spread of disease. Diseases are also spread by water splashing on leaf surfaces. Watering plants at the base and early in the day (to let them dry out) will help keep fungal and bacterial diseases at bay. (UMN, 2006)

Scouting, or the routine examination of landscape plants, helps to determine when pest problems are reaching a critical damaging threshold. Pest identification is important; the Garden Information site at the University of Minnesota (www.extension.umn.edu/gardeninfo) can help determine what insect or disease you have.

If damage is noticed before an insect population reaches a damaging level and when the insect is at a vulnerable stage, many problems can be easily thwarted by environmentally kind measures—ranging from hand-picking to hosing down with water. (U of M Extension, 2005)

Do You Know?

Q: How many of the insects in your yard are harmful?

A: Only 1% to 2% of the insect population is harmful! Insects not only play an important role in the landscape as pollinators and food for wildlife. Many insects are beneficial because they prey on harmful ones, keeping them within bounds. Many insecticides kill beneficial insects as well as harmful ones and should be used carefully and judiciously. (UMN, 2005)

Keep Pests Away from Plants

Mulch preserves moisture, eliminates weeds, and keeps the soil surface cooler which benefits earthworms, microorganisms, and plant roots. Mulch also prevents soil-borne fungi from splashing onto leaves when it rains. Try using ‘trap crops’ to attract certain insect pests, and concentrate them in one place where they might be more easily controlled. Row covers and stem collars can prevent pests from reaching susceptible plants.

Diversify

Plant a wide range of plants in your landscape. Pests can flourish in a monoculture or a garden with a single type of plant. A diverse landscape maintains a balance that discourages devastating outbreaks of disease or insect attack. Such a landscape also attracts birds and other wildlife, butterflies, and a variety of beneficial insects. (UMN, 2005)

Use Less Toxic Pesticides

Horticultural oils and insecticidal soaps disrupt the physiological processes of insects without risk to humans and pets. Bacteria (e.g. the commonly available Bt formulations), fungi, and nematodes reduce insect populations. Some botanically based pesticides, such as pyrethrins may be “organic,” but are as toxic as synthetic products and should be used with caution. (URI, 1999)

For more information see: www.extension.umn.edu/gardeninfo/

References:


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