



ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot For week of May 25, 2009

Damp Weather Has Brought Out Garden Pests

As the weather is getting warmer, our gardens are thankfully growing. We're still dealing with challenges of the record-breaking May rainfall. One of those challenges is the presence of many bugs and 'critters' that have invaded our gardens, lawns, and flower beds.

Garden pests usually come in a couple of versions: Those that eat vegetable plant parts for food and those that use the sap for their source of food.

Chewing Pests

Damage from insects that chew on plant parts are more likely to be discovered first since holes in the leaves and vegetable fruits are quickly spotted. Chewing insects in the vegetable garden could be the tomato hornworm, bean leaf beetle, potato beetles, cabbage worm, corn earworm, plus a few other miscellaneous beetles and worms.

The type of chewing insect will determine how you should manage that pest. Control can be simple like removing egg masses before they hatch or removing the very young caterpillars while their appetite is small.

If a chemical spray is absolutely necessary, consider using the one that is least harmful to the environment that will control the pest insect. Apply treatments when the insects are smaller rather than larger, and direct the sprays where the insects are feeding or hiding during non-feeding periods during the day.

Chewing insects are typically treated with products that are ingested as the insect feeds, they will eat a little more, and then be no more.

Sap-Eating Pests

The other versions of garden pests cause damage that is harder to see, and the insects themselves are quite small. These insects use their mouthparts to remove the plant juice or sap from leaves and stems. They do their damage over time, taking away food that would otherwise be going to produce larger or more fruits. The most common ones are aphids, mites and thrips, each one operating a bit differently.

Aphids are the biggest of these small insects. Aphids exude a sticky wet substance called "honeydew". This sticky material is shiny and pretty easily seen. The aphids themselves may be nearly the same color as the plant or could be hiding under the foliage.

Mites feed on our vegetable plants by injecting a fluid through their mouthparts, breaking down the plant cells, leaving minute yellowing spots on the foliage. Mites favor hot weather and younger plant parts. A telltale sign of mites besides the yellowing foliage is a mass of very small spider webbing in the area where they are feeding and on the undersides of the foliage. Mites are about 1/100 of an inch in size.

Thrips are also small, about 1/16th of an inch, and favor growing plants and flowers, distorting and preventing the plants from growing properly. You would need a hand lens to see these, so the symptom you are looking for will be the distorted growing points and lack of new growth.

These sap-eating insects can be managed by using a forceful stream of water and dislodging the pests. Repeat this regularly until you see normal growth resume for thrips, when the sticky shiny honeydew goes away for aphids, or the leaves return to a normal green color for mites.

Since these insects do not actually eat any plant parts, a contact pesticide is needed to properly manage the pest populations.

Keep in mind that not all insects are 'bad'. Beneficial insects such as Ladybugs, Hover & Robber flies, Assassin bugs, and Wasp parasites actually feed on harmful insects. Make sure you know what you are trying to eradicate before you start. It could be one of the 'good guys'.

If you have questions on home gardening or related topics, remember that the Limestone County Master Gardeners have a 'HelpLine' on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. They are highly trained and willing to help with your home gardening and home grounds questions. Their phone number is 232-5510 and they are located in an office at the Limestone County Extension Office at 1109 W. Market Street in Athens.



Tomato HornWorm



Aphids

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