

MANAGING INSECTS IN THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

INSECTS are the most abundant and diverse form of life found on earth and are a vital part of the world's ecosystems. Of the 750,000 species of insects known to exist, only a small portion are pests to humanity and crops. Most insects observed in the landscape are causing no harm. Learn which insects are beneficial or detrimental in the garden.

Diagnosing An Insect Problem

- Check plants regularly. Early detection means easier control.
- Identify the plant affected. Pests are usually crop-specific.
- Identify the signs and symptoms - type and extent of damage to leaves, stems, flowers, fruit or roots. Use a hand lens.
- Identify the insect using these signs and symptoms. Easiest if insect is present.
- Evaluate if management efforts are warranted. Determine how much damage is acceptable to you (looks unattractive, stunted growth, plant dying).
- Evaluate management options effective for this insect.

Management Options - healthy plants with minimal health/environmental hazards

- Cultural: Plant resistant varieties and pest-free materials.
Apply proper water and nutrients (minimize plant stress).
Space plants appropriately.
Diversify plantings. Interplant unrelated plants.
Remove weeds and other hiding places.
Remove infested plants.
Rotate crop locations.
- Mechanical: Use row covers, traps or barriers, such as plant collars.
Hose insects off the plants.
Hand pick insects off plants, drown in soapy water.
- Bionatural: Protect and encourage beneficial insects, birds and bats.
Plant host plants for beneficial insects.
Import and release beneficial insects.
- Chemical: Last resort. Avoid unwarranted use.
Research and use the appropriate product for the identified insect.
Use a product labeled for edible crops.
Read the label. Apply correctly and carefully.
Always spot treat. Avoid blanket spraying.