

Pest Management

Seeing hard work in the garden or landscape destroyed by pests can be a frustrating experience. Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to limit the amount of damage pests can do. Keys to effective pest management include: prevention, monitoring and identifying pests, establishing thresholds of action, and controlling damage by the best means possible. If done properly, effective pest management will limit pest damage by the most economic means possible with the least amount of effect on people and the environment.

Prevention

Perhaps the most effective way to manage pests is to prevent them before they become a problem. Many key steps to prevention occur before the plant or seed is in the ground. When buying a plant or seed, buy from only reputable sources, and when selecting your seed, look for the most pest resistant varieties. Additionally, a regular rotation of crops will help assure that insects and disease do not overwinter in the soil and become a nuisance year after year.

Further prevention can come in the form of limiting the likelihood that pests will be attracted to your home or garden. All insects and animals require three things to live: food, water and shelter. Thus, limiting these things around the area will limit the amount of pests found. Doing things such as keeping weeds and grass trimmed down will remove potential shelter for pests, while limiting potential food and water sources (bird baths, pet food, decaying plant matter, etc) will decrease the likelihood of attracting pests from outside areas.

Additionally, many insects and disease find refuge in moist areas. Therefore, doing things such as spacing plants out, keeping them well pruned, as well as irrigating in the morning rather than at night will decrease the amount of moisture present and increase airflow in the landscape. This also ties into proper sanitation around the home. For instance, if a plant is diseased, prune it out immediately and rid the area of any infected or dead plant tissue, as this is also a perfect haven for insects and disease.

Furthermore, when planning your garden or landscape, plan for a diverse group of plants. Many insects and plant diseases are host specific; therefore, having a diverse group of plants will slow or stop an outbreak if it were to occur.

Finally, plants are much more susceptible to an attack if they are unhealthy. Therefore, consistently monitoring plants and making sure they are well watered, getting the appropriate nutrients from the soil and are generally healthy and thriving will increase their chances of successfully combating a problem.

Monitoring & Identification

Keeping a keen eye on plants and working to correct problems before they get out of hand will also go a long way in effective pest management. Many times, an infestation can be prevented; for example, if an inspection finds insect egg clusters which could easily be picked off and destroyed prior to hatching.

Monitoring can be made even easier through observation and record keeping. For example, most insects and disease strike the landscape a certain time of year, or when the weather conditions are favorable. Knowing when these times are and being prepared for them will lead to fewer problems later on.

Establishing Thresholds

The basis of effective pest management often times is in the form of control, not eradication. Completely ridding the garden or landscape of pests would be expensive, environmentally unsafe, and ultimately unachievable.

Therefore, it is important to determine at what point action should be taken to deal with a pest population. Typically, this is around the time it becomes clear that the pest is becoming an economic threat or will affect future crops or pest management decisions.

Pest Control

If it is determined that control of the pest is warranted, there are three types of effective control methods to use: mechanical, biological, and chemical.

Mechanical control is the first option to consider, as these methods are often cheapest and have minimal effect on the environment. Examples of mechanical control include: hand picking, establishing barriers, setting traps, and soil tillage.

Another method of control is biological, which is the use of natural biological processes to combat pests. The most popular form of biological control is the promotion of beneficial, predatory insects in the landscape. Many different species of beneficial insects exist, the most popular being: lady beetles, stink bugs, and predatory mites. Their introduction and promotion in an environment will limit the number of pests present, given the timing of introduction is adequate.

Chemical control is an also effective measure of control, though it should only be used if the pest threshold is met and other control methods are going for naught. The first step in effective chemical control is the correct identification of the pest. Different pests warrant different chemical treatments, and every pest has a different life cycle, making the selection and timing of the application critical. The key is to make the application at a point when the pest is most susceptible. For instance, an insect in its larval stage may or may not be as susceptible to a treatment as when it is an adult. Also, be sure to check and make sure that the pest is still present during application. If the chemical application is made after the damage to the plant is already done, and the pest is long gone, it will be a waste of time and money.

Once the pest is identified and timing of the application is verified, use the chemical with caution, reading and following all label directions.

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Helping Hand Hints



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