

Summer pests: to spray or not to spray...

Late summer is so exciting in the food garden - abundance is everywhere, including the pests! If you have had an influx of pests take this opportunity to consider why. Was your garden stressed (lack of nutrition or water or shelter)? Do you have enough biodiversity? Did you overdo the fertilisers? Monocultures, stressed plants and weak sappy growths (caused by too much fertiliser) invite the pests over.

Prevent pests by strengthening your gardens resilience. This means creating a sheltered, biodiverse and nourished environment. Make sure all your inputs are healthy and robust. Keep a watchful eye on your crops and nip pests in the bud, and **never spray**.

Chemical sprays suit our fast paced life style, but like most 'fast' things they have serious health implications for ourselves, our soils, our waterways, our air. They disturb nature's fine balance. Don't be afraid to let a pest take its course naturally - you may lose this seasons crop but you will invite a score of natural predators. If you have a spray free; bio diverse garden those same predators will be hanging out ready to tuck into those same pests next summer.



Passionvine Hoppers are a sap sucking bug. They cause a lot of damage, and are very difficult to spray. Take ten minutes to read about their lifecycle, and you will see that these Aussie imports hatch in spring as tiny, jumping nymphs, and by late summer they have grown lacy wings - now they fly as well as jump! However, from March to October they are laying very still in their eggs. Find them in the thin twigs and tendrils of the host plant. They are very obvious. The eggs are laid in lines - the tufts of plant fibre give them away. Snip them out and feel very clever as you burn them!

Shield Bugs love to make holes in your beans and tomatoes (as well as grapes, cucumbers, pumpkins, capsicums....) and suck the life out. Shield bugs wear a triangle shield, marked with three dots in a line, on their bright green back. Manage these guys by planting a catch crop (ie: a preferential source of food) nearby. Choose from mustard, cleome, or grow some sacrificial beans. Time your catch crop to be flowering in time with the crop you are trying to protect. When you squash a shield bug it will send out a warning to all its other whanau whereby they will all start dropping off the plant like mad! Use this system to your advantage and lay a cloth down beneath the plant and start squashing. Once the evacuation is complete roll it up, and stomp the bugs to death. Shield bugs are very easy to catch and squash and, as they smell disgusting, I have found its the perfect job for murder mad little boys!

Its worth the little effort it takes to stomp out as many adults as possible because each female adult will lay hundreds of eggs over the summer sending your population spiralling out of control. Keep an eye out for any over wintering adults - a stitch in time saves nine.....





Scale is a big family – many different types affecting many different plants. Like all the other suckers drain the sugars out of your plants. Black sooty moulds often grow as a result of the honeydew. Eventually the host plant will become unwell. Scale has a tough protective waterproof covering, so needs to be suffocated. A few sprays with Neem oil a month apart should do the trick. You need to repeat spray because Neem won't kill the eggs the first time round. While Neem is a natural spray, it

is strong and will affect your garden friends. The alternative is to encourage ladybirds (especially the amazing blue one), and parasitic wasps.

Aphids are a modern obsession! I don't have to manage this pest and believe that is because of the richness of biodiversity in my garden, and because I fertilise my plants only when they need it. Aphids are sugar junkies – they stick their long needle into the plant and suck the life out by main-lining the nitrogen supply and, like any irresponsible needle user, they spread disease. They become an infestation overnight because they lay claim to the fastest reproductive cycle ever. Squashing aphids is an easy (if not sticky!) way to deal to them. You can spray aphids with soapy water (eco friendly of course). If they get out of hand and you are panicking then use pyrethrum, but realise you will put off the beneficial crowd too. Consider how attractive you make your garden to aphids when you pile exorbitant amounts of nitrogen rich fertilisers on in spring - creating delicious, fresh, sappy growths. These growths are aphid magnets. I know you were hoping your garden would be bountiful – ironically your pests are instead. Learning when and how much to feed your various plants is the key.



Concentrate on building up your beneficial insect population. Develop your biodiversity, give up your spray bottle and entice a vast range of natural predators – lacewings, hoverflies, ladybirds, silvereyes and parasitic wasps all love a diet of aphid let them do the work and say goodbye to aphid infestations forever.



Mealybug is a bit of a secret squirrel - were it not for the cottony white nests you may not notice it. However it's worth noticing – just another late summer, prolific breeding, sucking bug. Because Mealybugs are waterproof you need an oil spray such as Neem to suffocate them. Remember to repeat spray to make sure you get the newly hatched ones. Natural predators are ladybirds and parasitic wasps – but they will disappear when the Neem oil comes out – so make your choice – to spray or not to spray.....

Books to help out:

- Backyard Bugs* by Bruce Chapman
- Companioning Planting in NZ* by Brenda Little
- Creative Sustainable Gardening in NZ* by Diana Anthony
- Managing Pest and Disease* by Rod Lucas
- Backyard Battlefield* by Rudd Kleinpaste
- Natural Garden* by Micheal Crooks
- Koanga Garden Guide* by Kay Baxter
- Organic Garden Calendar* by Kath Irvine