

The Garden Corner

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Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

There's a battle going on in our little pocket of the world. On the one side we have the intrepid gardener with a head filled with visions of perfect season's fruit; and, on the other the legions of critters whose main goal in life is to wreak havoc upon that dream. What's a gardener to do?

In a perfect world where dreams and wishes and hopes all came true we could buy a product to immediately cure our growing problem without the highly toxic side effects. Unfortunately, we do not live in such a world. So, again: What's a gardener to do?

My recommendation: Get informed. Before we buy that container of herbicide or pesticide, read the instructions and carefully consider the ramifications of some of the side effects, like: Don't allow pets or children to come in contact with treated surfaces for at least 24 hours. Or: Will kill targeted and untargeted populations of insects. Here's another: Can enter into a community's drinking water source. One last: Wear mask and gloves. Can cause breathing problems and skin irritations.

These "cautions" are clearly printed within the information accompanying the various products sold worldwide and yet we continue to purchase and to use these chemicals like there's no tomorrow. However, there are satisfactory alternative methods to cure most of our ills. Here are a few ideas we use with very good results in our gardens.

Once we get some heat in our daily temperatures and your tomatoes start to grow well, you will probably meet Mr. Hornworm. Just pick him off; and, if you like to fish, you've got some bait! Aphids can be a real nuisance. A healthy lady bug population will make short work of these creepy crawlies. Don't have any lady bugs? You can mail order the adults through catalogues or on-line; might as well include in your order some praying mantis too. What about weeds and grass in places they shouldn't be? Regular white vinegar (10 to 20 percent solution) will do the trick; plus, it breaks down into sugars and feeds soil microbes. And, the fossilized remains of algae, commonly known as Diatomaceous earth, rips open the soft underbellies of rambunctious raiders like slugs and snails – Now that's justice!

Time and space do not allow for a full accounting for all the alternatives to the use of herbicides or pesticides. The intent of this month's article is to figuratively implant a seed (pun intended) that will grow to produce a proud gardener bent upon leaving a smaller chemical footprint behind. For specifics write to: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: maandpak@embarqmail.com and I'll get right back with you.