HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

TAKE CARE IN FIGHT AGAINST INSECTS

The hot, humid summers and mild winters of Central Florida create an ideal habitat for insects of all shapes and sizes. Ants, cockroaches and termites are in abundance in the Sunshine State.

However, only one-tenth of 1 percent of all the insects in the world are considered a nuisance.

When infestations of insects enter our home, action needs to be taken. As a homeowner, there are two choices: Take care of the problem ourselves, or hire a professional.

So how do we choose a pesticide company?

With hundreds of pest-control companies in Central Florida, it can be difficult choosing the right one. It is important when paying for a pesticide service to feel that we have received the most skilled efforts for our money.

Hopefully, with a few tips, your decision will be made easier.

Who's who in a pest-control company? There are three main people you should know: the certified operator, the salesperson and the spray technician. The certified operator is the real professional in the company who trains and supervises the technicians.

They are the ones who are licensed.

They must pass a rigid examination and meet many qualifications to demonstrate their competence. Certification is available in four categories: general household pest control, termites or other wood-destroying organisms, lawn and ornamental pest control, and fumigation. Companies that have operators certified in all four categories may offer total pest-control services; otherwise they may offer only the services for which they have a certified operator.

The salesperson is usually your first contact with the company. They inspect premises, determine the extent of the problem, and give estimates for work to be performed. Mostly this is a free service, but always remember to shop around, making sure that the diagnosis of the problem is correct and the estimate is reasonable.

The service technician is the individual who does the actual pest-control work. The quality of the control of pests depends to a large degree on the training the technician has received and his or her professionalism.

When shopping for pest-control service, the following steps should be taken:

1. Shop around for the best service at a reasonable price. Contact the small companies as well as the large ones.
2. If you do not know how to recognize insect infestation or damage, ask the salesman to show you evidence of pest damage.
3. Have the salesperson certify in writing that the premise is infested with a specific pest and treatment is required.
4. You may confirm the salesperson's diagnosis by sending evidence of the pest or damage to the Cooperative Extension Service office.
5. Get opinions from two or more pest-control firms before deciding on expensive and extensive treatments.
6. Read the proposed contracts carefully so you know exactly what the company will do and guarantee. Ask the salesperson to explain any parts you do not understand.
7. Check with the Better Business Bureau.

Selling unnecessary pest-control services is prohibited by state law.
Pest-control firms cannot tell you that a pest is infesting your property or structure, or that a specific treatment for pest control is required, unless supporting evidence of an infestation exists. However, you still should be cautious when buying such services.

For more information on buying pest-control service, including specifics on contracts for wood-destroying organisms, contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners at 321-697-3000. They are available to take your gardening questions Mondays through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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