

Beneficial Bugs in the Landscape

There are many people who are of the notion that the only good bugs are the dead ones. This belief is far from the truth; in fact it is proven that most bugs are beneficial to our landscape and are not harmful. Please note that one has to be very mindful that there are actual insect imposters that are harmful, they resemble the beneficial insects and pretend to be the good guys. One insect imposter that came to mind is the Mexican bean beetle which is one of the worst enemies to our vegetable garden but often mistaken for a lady beetle which is a beneficial insect. In addition, the bigeyed bugs are beneficial and are often identified as chinch bug which feed on the roots of our lawn. Knowing this information, it is therefore important that homeowners and landscapers alike be able to properly identify all bugs before administering any form of control measures. If the landscapers or homeowners are unable to properly identify an insect they can take it to the UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County for a free identification. The Extension Agent will give the clientele the best recommendation for an effective control.

Furthermore, when considering controlling landscape pests, always keep a threshold level in mind. First thing to remember is that pest caused aesthetic damage and economic loss. Therefore ask yourself how much damage you can tolerate, not because you see an insect it means that there is an outbreak. If you believe you cannot tolerate the present level of pest infestation, then you should turn to the best control measures which should be an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach. It is important to point out that IPM approach combines management approaches for greater effectiveness of pest control. Another key point is that IPM approaches are grouped in the four categories namely; biological, cultural, mechanical and chemical. Biological control uses natural enemies to control pests. One good example of biological control is using parasitic wasp to control tomato horn worm. Cultural control uses cultural practice to reduce pest establishment and survival, a good example that comes to mind is practicing good sanitation in the landscape or garden by not having trash or debris that insects can use as a habitat. Mechanical and Physical Control- this kills pests directly or make the environment unsuitable. Using a trap to control rodents is a good example of mechanical control. Finally, chemical control is simply using pesticides. First thing to remember is that with IPM, using chemical as a form of control should be the last resort and should be combined with other approaches for a more effective control. It is also important to note that pesticides should be applied in a manner that will not harm the environment and human. Each time pesticide is applied to the landscape it has the potential to kill both harmful and beneficial insects. Another thing to consider when using pesticide timing of application; pesticide should not be applied when plants are flowering, this will result in killing pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

A good way to protect beneficial insects is to practice scouting. Scouting is the practice by which a homeowner or landscaper visits the landscape at least on a weekly basis during the growing season to observe any insect pests activity or the presence of pests. If you identify an insect as being harmful, you can hand pick it, crush it or release it elsewhere. Our goal is to protect our beneficial insects by using less toxic or biorational pesticides. This article is written by Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County. I can be reached at 321-697-3000 or email at gricketts@ufl.edu.