

Oh My! Bugs are Bugging my Plants

If you are like me then I know you like to see perfect unblemished plants both in your vegetable garden and landscape. I found out early in life that there is no perfect garden that is free from insects and other problems. Have you ever wondered why we have so many insects here in Central Florida? I believe the answer is the warm temperature. Not all bugs are bad bugs! Surprisingly, not every one of us knows that only about 1 % of the insect population is pest. Please note that it is important to accurately identify an insect before applying any type of control because there might be beneficial insects in the garden and you don't want to kill them.

Minimizing insect damage- When planning a garden, it is always important to select vigorous, healthy, insect free plants. In addition, to reduce insect damage, it is important that there is no debris in close proximity to the garden. Debris provides a safe harbor for insect pests.

Controlling Insects- It seems to me that the insect population has increased with rain and warm temperature. I took a walk to my garden at the back of my office and it was very discouraging just to see the insect damage. My tomatoes, okra, squash and cantaloupes were all severely eaten; but I choose to keep the insect damage leaves over spraying pesticides. I know it might sound crazy but I have many plants flowering and others with fruits. Applying pesticides to flowering plants will kill beneficial insects such as bees and butterflies. Furthermore, most pesticides have a withdrawal period before harvesting; applying pesticides to fruiting plants will not allow time for the withdrawal period before harvesting.

When considering insect control, chemical should be the last option. First, use the friendliest approach available such as physically removing the insect by hand picking or even by using water from the garden hose to beat insects off plants. You can also install companion plants such as marigolds between plants to repel certain insects. Encouraging beneficial insects in the garden is also a great way to control insect pests. These days there are many great organic insecticides at your local garden stores; try organic control, it will work but maybe a little slower. Organic controls are safer to use. If you are not an organic gardener and everything you tried failed, then use the more aggressive control. Always remember to read the label before applying any chemical.

For more information on landscaping and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3000 or email gricketts@ufl.edu.