

Adopt a Holistic Approach to Pest Management

Pesticides (including weed and bug killers) can be effective tools for controlling pests such as insects, weeds and diseases. Be sure you need a pesticide before you use it. On-going pest problems are often a sign that your lawn or garden is not getting what it needs to stay healthy. You need to correct the underlying problem to reduce the chance of pests reappearing. Remember, a holistic — or integrated pest management — approach is the most effective way to manage pests. Here's how:

Start with prevention.

Maintain healthy soil with compost and mulch.

Select pest-resistant plants and put them in the sun/shade and soil conditions they like.

Use a variety of plants so, if pests attack, your whole garden isn't at risk.

Mow higher. Most grasses should be mowed to a height of two to three inches. Taller grass has more leaf surface and deeper roots and eventually chokes out many weeds.

Clean out diseased plants so disease doesn't spread.

Pull weeds before they go to seed and spread.

Remove dead plants to reduce hiding places for insect pests.

Identify the problem before you spray, squash or stomp.

Whether it's a bug, disease or weed, you need to identify it to know how to effectively manage it. The cause of ailing plants or grass may not be pests or disease but incorrect mowing or pruning, improper watering or other easily corrected practices. That scary bug could actually be a beneficial "good bug" that eats problem pests.

Accept a little damage — give nature time to work.

Accept a few pests, as long as they are not harmful to the long-term effects of the landscape. Natural predators often bring pests under control, but they need time to work. Monitor your landscape to spot signs of pests but don't spray at the first sign of damage — nature may control it for you or plants may outgrow the damage.

If a pest or weed problem develops, use an integrated approach to solve the problem.

Physical controls like traps, barriers, fabric row covers or plants that repel pests can work for some pests.

Use a little "elbow grease." Long-handled weed pullers pop dandelions and other weeds out easily.

Mulching, not to exceed three inches, reduces weeds in garden beds.

Use "crop rotation" techniques by changing the planting location for annuals to minimize their susceptibility to pests and disease.

Replace problem plants with pest-resistant ones for a healthier, care-free yard.

If a plant, even a tree, has insect, pest or disease problems every year, consider replacing it with a more tolerant or resistant variety or another type of plant that doesn't have these problems.

Use pesticides responsibly.

Carefully read and follow pesticide product label instructions. Avoid overuse of pesticides. When you have a small problem area, treat just that area, not the entire yard. Most bugs are good bugs. Only about 5–15 percent of the bugs in your yard are pests. "Good bugs," like the ladybug and the praying mantis, help control pests.