

What's Bugging You?
Greg Grant, Tyler Morning Telegraph
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Many kinds of insects feed on garden plants. They damage plants in two ways. Some chew holes in the leaves, stems, roots, or fruit, and some stick their snout into the plants and suck out plant juices. Insects attack garden plants at all times of the year. Some insects will feed on sprouting seed and young seedlings. Others feed on the growing plant or the mature plant and its fruit.

The insects that feed on garden plants can be divided into two main groups: piercing-sucking insects (aphids, stink bugs, squash bugs, etc.) and chewing insects (caterpillars, grasshoppers, potato beetles, etc.).

Gardeners must learn to recognize insect problems. To know when insects are damaging your plants, watch for anything that doesn't look normal. The following symptoms will help you recognize insect problems. 1. Plants are stunted and do not grow properly. 2. Plants have deformed or damaged leaves and fruit. 3. Plants look yellow or pale in color. 4. Plants look wilted and droopy. If your plants show any of these symptoms, examine each plant closely for insects. Also examine the soil near the base of the plant, as many insects drop and hide there when disturbed.

A number of insects can be managed without using pesticides, but this cultural control requires extra time, effort, and scouting. It may also result in moderate damage to your plants. Some of the cultural methods you can use to prevent or control insect damage are: 1. Keep weeds and grass out of the garden and mow around the garden. 2. Plant varieties that grow well in your area and plant them at the right time. 3. Apply the correct amount of fertilizer and water when needed. 4. When you have picked all the fruit, destroy the old plants by removing them or plowing them under. 5. You can wash off some insects, such as aphids and spider mites, with a water hose. 6. You can hand-pick some insects or egg masses from the plant to prevent damage.

Chemical control of insects may be necessary. For best results, treat insects before large numbers build up. Dusts or sprays provide

good control. Before you buy any pesticide, read the label to see if it is recommended for the pest and plants you want to treat. Before you use a pesticide, read the label to see how much you should use and how long you have to wait before harvesting. Read all information on the label and follow all directions. All insecticides are poisonous, so handle them with care and keep them away from children and pets.

If you'd like to learn more about insects in your garden, plan to attend the Smith County Master Gardeners' First Tuesday in the Garden Tuesday September 7, from noon till 1:00 in the IDEA Garden where Terri Gerber will present "What's Bugging You." Terri will take you through different types of vegetables and identify some of the insects that cause damage. She'll also discuss mitigation and the plant-pest-predator relationship as part of a diverse ecosystem. Seating is limited so bring a lawn chair.

The IDEA Garden is part of the Tyler Botanical Garden and is located in the southeast corner of the Tyler Rose Garden at the corner of Houston and Peach Streets. The garden and program are free and open to the public.

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Image Caption: *Children may not like vegetables, but insects do.*