

Plant & Pest Problems in Vegetable Gardens

All vegetable gardens have some plant and pest problems. Most plant problems are caused by extreme weather, soil problems, or human error, such as planting in the wrong spot, overwatering, planting old seeds, or not using enough fertilizer. Many animals (especially insects) and plant diseases evolved to use "our crops" as their natural food source.

Set a reasonable expectation for the appearance, growth, and productivity of your crops. In most cases, plants can tolerate minor feeding damage and disease symptoms and produce a decent crop. Every year is different regarding weather, insect pest populations, and other factors, so don't expect identical results each year.

By following the integrated pest management (IPM) approach to any plant or pest problem, you can have a healthy, productive, organic garden.

1

Right Plant Right Care.

Grow healthy plants. Healthy plants have fewer problems with pests. The most important way to protect your plants is to give them with what they need:

sunlight, water, air, and nutrients.



2

Learn about pests and their natural enemies. Only a very small percentage of insects are pests of concern. For gardeners, most insects are helpful (pollinate crops, eat pest insects) or harmless. Learn about the handful of pests and plant diseases of concern in your area.



3

Check plants regularly for problems, insect damage, and disease symptoms. If you have a problem, check your plants several times a week and at different times of the day. Be sure to look at the undersides of the leaves, where insects often hide. Catching problems early will make them easier to control.

4

Identify problems. Use Master Gardener plant clinics, books, and University of Maryland Extension resources to accurately identify insect pests and plant symptoms (changes from normal growth and appearance).

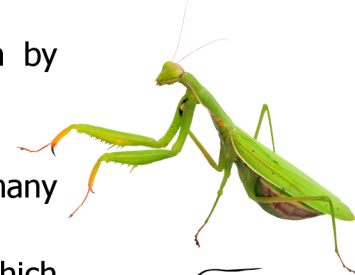


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Prevent and manage pests. Use Mother Nature and good gardening practices.



- You can invite beneficial insects into your garden by growing a habitat for them.
- Choose disease-resistant plant varieties.
- Plant breeders have bred disease resistance into many plant varieties.
- Check seed catalogs and seed packets to see which varieties are resistant.



- Hand picking large or slow-moving insects, slugs, and snails can keep pests in check in small gardens.
- Be sure to look for pests on the undersides and in the folds of leaves.



- A strong stream of water from your garden hose can knock off, injure, or drown small, soft-bodied pests like aphids, mites, mealybugs, and spittlebugs.

- The water must hit the pests directly, so aim at the undersides of the leaves, too.
- Spray water early in the day so plants have a chance to dry before evening. Repeat every few days as new insects hatch.

- Floating row cover is a lightweight white fabric used to cover garden beds. It keeps out pests but lets air, light, and water reach the plants growing underneath.
- Lay down the fabric right after sowing seeds, and bury the edges or hold them in place with bricks, rocks or landscape staples.



6

Targeted organic pesticide application.
Only if needed.

Clear your garden at the end of the season of all plant debris.

Keep weeds to a minimum

Learn more:

Web pages- go.umd.edu/FoodGardening

Get answers to your gardening questions-
go.umd.edu/AskExtension

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