

This week we completed the lesson on Insects and Integrated Pest Management (IPM). As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we don't use strong chemicals in our garden as it is important NOT to have our garden plants incorporate these chemicals. I've decided to repeat part of last week's newsletter as it is really worth repeating! So as I've indicated this lesson is the real challenge for the home and commercial gardener alike as it is hard to see the crops we planted being attacked by all sorts of pests (insects, birds, squirrels, plants, bacteria and fungi.) We have become so enamored by the quick and easy use of chemicals to kill (-cide) these unwanted pests that it is hard to see another way in which to cope with the threats to our crops. But the truth of the matter is that each organism is part of the overall balance of nature. As we learned pests have pests and as such can be thought of as part of a much larger food chain. Upsetting that balance through elimination of a species causes the food chain to have to adjust putting more pressure on the ecosystem. When the change is too great, the result is a cascade of adjustments sometimes resulting in the loss of a number of species. Do you recall that over 30 percent of our vegetables are made possible by pollinators such as bees, moths, and flies? If we spray to eliminate mosquitoes with a powerful insecticide (there's that suffix -cide again) we kill all sorts of pollinators as well. This practice can result in less available vegetables to eat. There is no easy fix (no one likes mosquitoes but certain birds and dragon flies do) so we all need to be thinking of alternative ways in which we can reach our goals with minimal negative effects on our ecosystems. Please keep that in mind as you reach for the spray can or think of other ways to eliminate the pest of the moment!

The gardens are looking great as we are beginning to head into summer garden planning and planting. The beds are filled with beautiful green vegetables while they continue to provide a bountiful harvests of lettuce, swiss chard, sugar snap peas, and radishes, we are beginning to remove some of the spring plantings in favor of the summer veggies. You will notice that the sugar snap peas in the main garden are gone as are the turnips and carrots! We've begun planting yard long beans, cucumbers tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and soon squash.

In the Orchard, we have growing peppers and within the last week the cucumbers in the oblong bed are up and looking skyward. The tomatoes are showing blooms and with the aid of the pollinators and wind we will be having tomatoes pretty soon. The sugar snap peas are finally producing but as the days get warmer, they too will stop producing. And so we shall take them out to make room for the sweet potatoes. We removed the white potatoes and planted some of the most promising seed potatoes in bed O-5 but they are still not above ground. So it's time to recognize we will not be harvesting white potatoes this school year.

The Orchard's new citrus is showing an abundance of flowers and also some beginning fruit on all the trees. While it looks fantastic, and promising these small new trees will not be able to support all these buds and will drop a lot of them as time goes on. During the summer, we will also have to remove a lot of the starting fruit as their maturation will overly stress the tree as well as be too heavy for the trees to support causing broken limbs and split trees.

Since you all are garden investigators now please take time to look at the underside of the plants to see what "pests" there are and see if you can recognize which patterns of destruction goes with the appropriate pest!