

Good Bugs, Bad Bugs, Do You know the difference?

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How many times have you heard some one say, “Yuck, a bug, squish it”? I can’t tell you the number of times people have called my office looking for advice on how to eliminate insects from their home or yard when they don’t know if or what damage the insect is causing.

In the bug world looks can be deceiving. We are all familiar with the adult Ladybird beetle’s small red spotted body. Ladybird beetles are one our most important beneficial species. An immature Ladybird Beetle looks scary and ferocious! They are “affectionately” referred to as alligators. Fortunately for us, they are only ferocious to aphids, scale and other injurious insect pests.

There are many insect predators around your home and garden. Indiscriminate use of insecticide destroys not only the pest chewing up your tomatoes, but also destroys the beneficial insects that are there to prey on those pests. If you provide an environment that attracts and supports beneficial insects they will keep the numbers of and damage from insect pests to a minimum.

So, how do you decide when you have to take drastic measures and use pest control and how do you know when to let nature take its course? IPM or Integrated Pest Management techniques can help you to decide. IPM is an approach to controlling pests in safer, more effective, longer-lasting ways. When you use IPM, you

- a) understand a pest's identity and habits so non-toxic, preventative measures can be used first
- b) use a combination of different tactics for better effectiveness
- c) use least-toxic chemicals, if any

It is important to identify the insect, know its life cycle and understand when control measures, whether natural or chemical, would be most effective in controlling the pest. It is also important to know how much damage the plants you are growing can sustain without harm to their productive ability. Is one ant, chewing caterpillar or fly too many?

Get to know the insects around your home and yard, there are several guides to insect identification, both on-line and at the local library. Know what you are dealing with before you decide that you need “control”. Determine the least harmful method of keeping the pest population in check. Investigate the pest predators that could be of benefit to you and learn how to attract them to your yard. Not every bug you meet needs to be “squished”.

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