

# Give Holistic Pest Control A Try

KRISTA HARDING, HORTICULTURE AGENT

I enjoy spending time in my yard and tending to my flower beds like I'm sure many of you do too. But the thing I don't enjoy is insect pests, weeds and occasionally the plant diseases that come along as well. Many times, at the first sight of a pest or weed, we get excited and search the cabinet for some type of chemical control. But there are other options available such as "holistic" pest management.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Practice sanitation. Lots of insects and plant diseases love trash. It's their home. Get rid of garden debris – burn, bury or compost it.
2. Control weeds. Weeds compete with and weaken "desirable" plants, making them more susceptible to pest attacks. Some weeds can also be welcoming mats, serving as alternative hosts for various pests.
3. Practice diversity. Remember what happened when the nation planted so many American elms for shade in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Don't plant just one species. Rotate crops in your vegetable garden and flower beds to prevent buildup of pest populations and carryover of disease organisms.
4. Encourage beneficial insects such as lady beetles, praying mantis, garden spiders and honeybees. Create homes and/or food sources for them with flowering plants and mulches. Also, be careful when using insecticides to avoid bringing unnecessary harm to your garden's good guys.
5. Modify the environment. Many pests need a suitable habitat to do their dirty deeds. But, sometimes minor changes in gardening practices can have a significant impact on that. One example is providing adequate space between plants. Another is removing all the dead plant material at the end of the season.
6. Avoid wimpy plants. A host of today's plant varieties are bred to resist pest attacks. Some are naturally resistant or almost immune to problems.
7. Practice alternative controls. Go ahead and pick off that big, hungry, ugly tomato hornworm. If you can't destroy it, put it in the garbage can. Then see what a blast of water does to little bugs. Try "sweeping" fall webworms out of your trees.
8. Be pro-active. Go after pests when they are small enough to control easily, before they've caused serious crop injury or have spread to other plants.
9. Do what you know you should do. Identify the pest before you buy a pesticide. Find out whether it's really a problem. Only buy a pesticide that is labeled for your culprit. Follow the label's directions.
10. Keep harvests timely. Get the goodies before the pests do. Don't go through all the work of nurturing a garden only to forfeit the crop when it's ripe for picking.

If you are having any horticulture issues, please feel free to contact me at one of the Southwind District offices.

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