

Wagon Hill Farm Community Garden Pest Control Policies and Methods

The control of undesired insects and disease will be accomplished by “organic” gardening techniques. Recognizing that there are varying definitions for what constitutes “organic”, the following guidelines have been established. The purpose of these guidelines is to protect the safety and health of gardeners and visitors, and the nearby environment as well as to improve successful harvest. Pesticides are not necessary to grow healthy, attractive and bountiful gardens if the guidelines are followed.

Most insects and diseases prefer to attack stressed plants, so the first line of defense is to keep plants as healthy as possible. This is achieved through building and maintaining fertile, organic rich soil that is well aerated. Compost, aged manure and other organic materials are used, rather than synthetic fertilizers.

Garden beds should be protected with a layer of mulch to conserve water. Once plants are established, watering should be done when the soil dries out. It is not necessary to water everyday unless it is very hot and dry. Watering is best done with a watering can for young seedlings. Overhead watering is discouraged for mature plants because it is wasteful of the resource, encourages disease and is less effective than watering the soil underneath the plants.

The second line of defense against pests and disease, is to rely on simple measures such as the following:

Insect pests:

- time planting such that your plants are larger and more established when the pests are likely to be abundant
- hand-picking of large insects, removal of eggs from leaves
- physical barriers, such as row covers or cardboard collars
- traps
- use of resistant varieties
- inter-planting of repellent or “companion” plants
- crop rotation between years

Diseases:

- use of resistant varieties
- sanitation (keeping beds free of debris and over ripe vegetables)
- timing of watering

Weeds:

- mulching
- dense planting
- hand pulling

Animals:

- keep beds clean of fallen , over ripe , produce
- maintain a presence in the garden by tending beds regularly
- Apply recommended repellent

Small occurrences of pest insects and disease are expected. If the problem becomes serious and is spreading to neighboring beds, steps should be taken to control the infestations. If the preceding methods are not effective you may try an “organic pesticide” product. Pesticides are not used for prevention, but only after a problem has been diagnosed. Consult with the garden steward before using any pesticide, even those that are OMRI certified, to identify the insect or disease and to determine the best course of action.

When treatment is necessary, the least toxic solution is always tried first. Acceptable products are those that:

- deteriorate rapidly in sunlight, soil , and/or open air
- toxicity is specific to the pest

Soap Sprays: Soap sprays are useful for treating certain small, soft bodied insects, like aphids, psyllids, mealybugs and spider mites. Commercial insecticidal soap sprays such as “Safer’s” are available, or you can make your own: Here is the recipe for an effective, general purpose soap spray.

To 3 quarts of water, add one quart of rubbing alcohol and one tablespoon of liquid dishwashing soap such as “Ivory”. (Do not use soap meant for automatic dishwashers) An optional addition is one tablespoon garlic juice, and/ or one tablespoon hot pepper sauce. Test homemade sprays on a small part of the plant first.

Horticultural “summer” oils: Dormant oil sprays have long been used to kill overwintering insects on plants before they leaf out in early spring. In contrast, summer oils are ultra-fine oils that can be used during the growing season to control such insects as scale, aphids, mites, beetle larvae, and whiteflies. They act by smothering the insects, rather than poisoning them, therefore insects do not develop immunity.

Copper Dust: Copper dust or liquid is used to prevent and treat many diseases, including powdery mildew and early blight of tomatoes, two common diseases in this region.

All products should be cleared by the garden steward before use. They should be used with care, according to instruction and should be kept out of the reach of children.

