

Use of natural pesticides finding more support

A survey recently released by Organic Gardening Magazine reports a significant decrease in pesticide use among gardeners. The survey found that more than 60 percent of all gardeners don't use chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers. This is an increase of 15 percent in just two years.

I believe our local trash collection programs and those in many other places in the country have a ripple effect far beyond garbage disposal. These programs certainly raise our awareness of ecological problems and increase our efforts as gardeners to be more "eco-conscious."

Although many of us have made a serious effort to garden as naturally as possible, it hasn't been easy. Outside of the Safer Insecticidal Soap and other Safer products, there hasn't been much help from institutions or commercial sources. But this is beginning to change.

For example, in response to new attacks on fungicides, the American Horticultural Society describes an interesting and important study by Cornell University's botany department. Professor of plant pathology, Kenneth Harkness, has shown that common household baking soda helps prevent the blackspot disease that ordinarily causes discoloration and dropping of rose leaves.

Marge Alpern

HORST TESTED a spray of bicarbonate of soda over three growing seasons. The roses "Pascals" and "Mr. Lincoln," chosen for their susceptibility to fungal diseases, were sprayed every three or four days from mid-April through October with various strength solutions. A solution of one tablespoon per gallon was found most effective in preventing damage from blackspot. Insecticidal soap was added to help the solution spread across the leaves.

"The study found by a manufacturer of sodium bicarbonate-based products was undertaken in an effort to find an environmentally safe and inexpensive treatment for fungal diseases," said Horst.

He also said that it isn't uncommon for fungal diseases to develop a tolerance to chemical fungicides.

The university isn't recommending unrestricted use of baking soda by home gardeners at this time because studies aren't complete. High concentrations of the solution may burn some varieties with greater sensitivity.

I can't report great success with the baking soda treatment on roses but, perhaps I didn't start early enough and now it's too late. So now I'm going to try another safe and highly recommended remedy instead of the powerful, but effective chemical—fungicide—Anti-transpirants, such as Wilt-Proof, have been used for some time to prevent winter burn, especially on broad-leaved evergreens. They are now being suggested as very effective and safe fungicides.

Some rose growers reported that a monthly spray of anti-transpirants, three to four teaspoons per gallon, prevented powdery mildew and other diseases on roses. It's late in the season to try this, but I have little to lose.

A home remedy for the control of aphids, spider mites and white fly was recently recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture. This information was reported in the Wall Street Journal, and later in a publication of the Brooklyn Botanical Garden.

To make this safe and inexpensive spray, add one tablespoon of dishwasher detergent to one cup of salad oil. Soybean oil was used in the trials, but other kinds work equally well. Next mix one to two and a half teaspoons of the solution with one cup of water. Spray directly on the plants every 10 days.

THIS TREATMENT worked very effectively in my garden against the tough, invisible spider mites that had been attacking some small, young junipers in my yard. Two treatments a week apart solved an old problem, at least for now.

In the search for effective natural fertilizers as opposed to synthetic ones, gardeners are branching out and experimenting quite successfully with not just dionine, sheep or cow manure, and bonemeal, but also cottonseed meal, ground alfalfa or alfalfa pellets. I broadcast ground alfalfa on my raspberry bushes early in the season and the bushes are loaded with berries. I'd like to think the alfalfa was responsible for this.

As I follow the encouraging news of the heightened ecological awareness there is another aspect to this movement that we can't ignore. The following quotation is from the American Horticultural Society, an unprejudiced and honest source.

"Does the public know how carefully pesticides are tested and regulated, and that it is not their use but

their abuse that threatens us? And do they consider whether and how much the price of fresh produce might increase and its availability decrease, if stopped using chemicals to grow it? The public needs a balanced view. This is why organizations such as ours exist. There is no substitute for sound empirical data."

The information goes on to tell us that the pesticide industry, those who manufacture, mix, sell and get paid to apply garden chemicals, are now banding together to tell their side of the story and to diversify their product line. Rather than try to

convince gardeners that old products are safe, companies such as Dow, Monsanto, and Ortho are emphasizing current and new products that can be viewed as more "natural."

Gardeners are demanding more nature-based products and the giants of the \$1.3 billion agricultural chemical industry are hurrying. For very practical reasons they have joined the universities and governmental research agencies and we can look forward to new techniques and new products which we as gardeners and consumers will welcome.

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