

How Gardener Can Save Nature's Balance

By BETTY FRANKEL

The quality of the environment is the concern of all of us, but the gardener has a special responsibility and a special role. He is in a sensitive position to positively benefit and improve the ecological system — or he can add to the destruction.

The gardener must realize, as most school children do by

now, that we live in a "closed" system. The earth is like a super space ship and nothing can be added and nothing can be removed. Our air, water, and mineral resources are finite. They can be used and combined in various ways, and then must be reused.

SOME OF OUR uses are extravagant and wantonly destructive, and some of the chemical combinations we've invented are proving to be lethal, adding poisons to the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat.

Perhaps the technologists and scientists can solve the problems that modern technology has created — but land use is equally important. Natural areas and farms must be preserved in rural areas, and greenbelts and parks must be established within cities to counter-balance all the acres of blacktop and cement and buildings that are covering the land.

Paved areas are detrimental to both the air supply and the water supply, in addition to often usurping the most fertile farmlands. When rain falls on paving and is channeled into a sewer that flows into a river, it is lost as

far as the ground is concerned. The more paving, the less water that can get into the ground to replenish the supply of ground water. Then the level of the water table drops — wells go dry and plants die because their roots can't reach the water.

THE GARDENER can plan his landscaping and the grading around his house so that the water that flows from his roof and off his patio and driveway can be returned to the ground rather than rushed into a sewer.

Small ponds and swampy areas are necessary parts of the ecology because water can collect in them. They should not be filled in and eliminated. If anything, more such areas should be created.

The gardener should become thoroughly familiar with his soil and his growing conditions so he can choose plants that will thrive. A healthy plant is sturdy and better able to resist diseases and pests, and therefore less apt to need chemical remedies.

As plants grow, they remove necessary elements from the soil. In nature the leaves accumulate where they fall and return to the soil the elements removed from it. But this isn't the way it works

in our gardens where we clean up leaves and spent plants. To compensate for this, gardeners should have a compost pile. The in a small confined area, plant

remains can accumulate and decay. For good measure add all your vegetable peelings and melon skins. They'll make a good compost, too. In about a year the compost becomes

rich humus, exactly what is needed to enrich the soil.

WITH HUMUS from compost used to enrich the soil, there should be little need to resort to chemical fertilizers which are costly and tend to leach out and get into the streams and lakes where growth of algae is encouraged.

If the gardener needs to use fertilizer, he should consider organic fertilizers. Millorganite is excellent for lawns. Manure or dried processed manure is good for vegetable gardens, and fertilizer processed from fish is excellent for flowers, shrubs, and house plants.

The gardener should keep a lookout for insects and diseases. Although it seems sensible to use preventive measures, actually it is better to wait and use pesticides only if trouble develops that can't be controlled otherwise. Many bugs can be picked or rubbed off. Only a bad infestation needs poison.

Remember that birds eat vast quantities of insects, so encourage them to come to the garden by putting up feeders,

houses and bird baths, and growing plants they relish.

If the insects get out of control use only the insecticides recommended by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. These are pyrethrum, malathion, sevin, methoxychlor, rotenone, nicotine sulfate, dormant oil, and lime sulfur. (Do not use DDT, aldrin, chlordane, dieldrin, lindane, heptachlor, or toxaphene. They are dangerous!)

Do NOT use a fungicide containing mercury. The others are generally not too dangerous.

Finally, 2,4-D is a relatively safe weed killer, but avoid using it if the weeds can be cut or pulled by hand.

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Garden Reminders

Plant deciduous trees and shrubs... Spring is the best time to plant fruit trees, magnolias, birch and other thin-barked trees... When working in perennial beds remember that plantations and some other plants are "late risers" and do not dig into them... To control scale, spray apple trees with sulfur just before the blossoms open... Sow seeds of peas, beans, broccoli, carrots, lettuce, radishes, Swiss chard, onions, leeks, parsley, parsnips, spinach, and turnips... Sow seeds of larkspur, bachelor buttons, cosmos, gypsophila, snapdragons, sweet alyssum, sweet peas, poppies, calendula.

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