

6 Easy Common Sense Tips To Ban Bugs From Your Garden Without Chemicals

Visit Our Blog At <http://solutionsfororganicgardening.com>

Contents

Tip 1.....Row Covers....Page 3

Tip 2.....Hand Picking...Ugh!

Tip 3.....Timing Is Everything

Tip 4.....Organic Pesticides...Please Read Instructions!

Tip 5.....Good Bugs

Tip 6.....Stealth Plants

Tip 1

Row Covers

To me, row covers are the best invention ever for the gardener. I have found so many uses for them and I keep finding more. They keep bugs off the plants, confuse the rabbits, let you start earlier in the spring, let you garden longer in the fall and can be used to over winter some crops.

But, since we are talking bugs here we will stick to the topic. First what is row cover? Good question.

Row cover is a spun material that will let light and water come through to the plant, but keep the bugs out. It can be found in different weights of material, but the heavier the cover the less light gets through, and used mostly for frost protection.

A very light weight cover, called floating row cover, is what we want to protect us from the critters.

Crops to use with row cover

You can cover anything with row cover, but it might not always be the best solution. Like crops that need to be pollinated cannot be cover while blooming.

Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower and Brussels Sprouts

I almost quit raising the above crops, because of the cabbage worms. These little things are usually green like the plants, and dang hard to see, or a stripped one that is very hungry. They can destroy a plant once they get started. Once they get into a broccoli head it is all over.

These plants were the first I tried with the row cover and the results are the reason I am still using it.

How to put on the row cover

First get a cover that is big enough to cover the plant when it is at full height. Broccoli can get tall, so get one big enough for that height.

Spread the cover over the row of plants. Weight the cover down on the edges with pins, rocks boards or sand bags.

I us pins I make myself out of a number 11 or 12 wire. You can get the wire at your local hardware store in a roll that will make a lot of ground pins. Make the pins by cutting off a length of wire between 10 to 12 inches. Bend the wire in half to make a u shape.

This will give you a pin that is 5 to 6 inches long. I like to fold over the row cover where I place the pin, so the cover will not tear out in a wind.

Be sure to check your plants often, as those little critters are very persistent and will, sometimes, sneak under your cover and have a hay day where the birds can't find them.

Vine Crops

Vine crops like melons, zucchini, cucumbers, etc. are pollinated plants and must be left uncovered when flowering. But, we can still utilize the cover.

Put on the row cover while the plants are still young, keeping the bugs from getting to the plants early on. Then when the vines start to flower you can remove the cover through the day and recover at night.

You will not be able to keep all the varmints away, but you can make a big difference in the damage they do.

Green beans

I started covering my green beans. First, because of the rabbits, then I liked those beautiful beans without any bug bites so well that I left it on. It is a good way to keep the bean beetles off the beans.

I have a new little brown beetle that eats big holes in my little bean plants. I'm putting the row cover on early, hoping they starve to death.

In late summer when it is time to plant turnips the flea beetles and a little striped worm jump on my turnips as soon as they get out of the ground. I have lost crops to them before I noticed they were there.

If you put the row cover on right after you plant you can get ahead of them. But, be sure to check the young plants out every-so-often. Those bugs are sneaky.

Tip 2

Hand Picking...Ugh!

Yup! You heard right. Just go ahead and pick that disgusting thing off of your plant.

I used to be a chemical person. You just did not know any better back then. Science was all the rage and was going to save mankind from himself.

So, when I got gobs of potatoes bugs on the potato plants I would whip out the sprayer and kill them. What I found out was that I was killing every crawling thing out there and probable gave a few birds a belly ache. Plus, I always had potato beetles to spray.

Learning about organic gardening, I decided to just pick off those bugs and put them in a jar of soapy water.

When I started I thought this is the dumbest Idea I have ever had. But, I persisted, as I had no other way to get rid of them without the spray.

The first year I picked a lot of potato bugs. But, the second year there was fewer to pick. The third even less.

Now, I seldom even see a potato beetle.

You will not have that success hand picking every kind of beetle as some are harder to catch and some hide better than potato beetles. But, it will work on a lot of them and well worth trying.

Just make up a jar of soapy water and walk through the garden. As you see a “bad” bug put it in the water. Do not kill the good bugs, like lady bugs. A gardener needs to learn the difference between their friends and the enemy.

Tip 3

Timing Is Everything

There are lots of things in life that require good timing planting the garden, fishing and things you say to your wife. Timing the planting of your vegetables can make a difference in the amount of insect damage you get on those plants.

Different insects peak in numbers at different times.

One of the best ways to beat the cinch bug to your vine crops is to plant as early as possible in the spring. You can use a plastic cover to warm the ground as fast as possible to give your vine crops a head start.

With cucumber beetles I plant several different crops of cukes to keep them confused. I have not found a way to keep the beetles off of the cucumbers as I raise mine on a trellis, and cannot cover with a row cover.

I plant crops in succession and watch for the beetles. Sticky traps work, somewhat, but you catch some friendly bugs too.

As soon as the plants start to show signs of wilt (which the beetles carry) I pull the plants and destroy them.

Spraying with an organic pesticide just does not seem to do a great job. Once the cucumber beetle gets started they just keep hatching. So it is a never ending battle.

Some crops, like green beans, you want to have growing all the time. So, you have to find other ways of beating the critters to your crop, like the row cover.

Tip 4

Organic Pesticides...Please Read Instructions

Organic pesticides different from chemical pesticides in many ways, one of the main ways they are different is the fact that they will break down quickly in nature, where some chemicals take forever.

If you are going to use a spray to solve all your pest problems please use one rated for organic gardeners.

Many of the organic pesticides work very well and do not harm the environment as much as a chemical pesticide. But, they still deserve much respect as they are a "cide", which means they kill things.

So many packages say harmful to bees and fish. If it will kill a fish what will it do to me? And, if it will kill a bee what about all those other insects I need to garden effectively?

I am not saying for you not to use an organic pesticide if you are having a problem you cannot solve. I will use a spray on a rare occasion, but I am saying be very selective and be very careful with how you use them.

One of the safest and best insecticides that I have used is Dipel. It is used on those cabbage worms we talked about earlier. If you are not using row covers you will need Dipel to grow your brassica crops.

I have used neem and pyrethrin with some success. Each pesticide has a use, so be sure to use the right product for your formula.

There are even products for slugs; you know those slimy things that get on your veggies at night. But, I have a sure method for getting rid of slugs, with only a few minor drawbacks.

I was seeing damage on the ripening strawberries, plus a few tops lying here and there. Having read about putting out a pan of beer for the slugs to drown in I thought I would give it try.

Carefully placing a pie pan full of beer ground level for the little critters to crawl into I retreated for the night. The next morning, upon checking my trap in the strawberry patch, the pie pan was empty of beer and thrown to one side and strawberry tops were everywhere. I figure the coon who, was raiding my berry patch, found the beer, went back to tell his friends and had a party. So, I never tried trapping the slugs again.

One thing you will find as you build up your soil many of the problems you have with weeds and insects will fall away. As you soil gets back into balance, and healthy, the pesky things will not be able to exist.

Tip 5

Good Bugs

You may be of the mindset that the only good bug is a dead bug, but that is something we must change for you to get the most from your garden.

There are bugs that are out there working for you every day, even as you sleep.

Ladybug

Let's start with one that most everyone knows, the ladybug, or lady beetle. They like to eat small insects with soft bodies like aphids and mites, but they also eat insect eggs.

Do not confuse the lady beetle with the Asian beetle that bugs the heck out of you in the fall and spring when they try to get into your house to over winter. That is the wrong bug.

Lady beetles are very beneficial and can often be seen working for you in the garden. Leave them alone when you see them on your plants. They are there looking for the bugs that are eating your plants.

Lacewings

The lacewing is a delicate looking insect with long wings for its body. This is not the killer of the family; it is the larva of the flying insect that we want to encourage. They also eat soft bodied insects, like aphids and mites, plus insect eggs and most anything they can find and consume.

If you find a hideous looking little creature in the beneath your plants take time to identify what it, that may be a lacewing nymph.

Trichogramma Wasp

Next up is the trichogramma wasp; yes I copied and pasted that one. Now, don't get upset by the wasp name. This little critter looks more like a fly than a wasp and does not sting. But, its larvae eat the eggs of a lot of nasty bugs we want to get eliminated.

The list includes armyworm, bagworm, European corn borer, peach borer, squash borer, cankerworm, alfalfa caterpillar, cutworm, corn earworm, wax moth, tomato hornworm, cabbage looper, and codling moth. Life would be a lot simpler without these guys lurking in our gardens.

This little wasp finds the eggs of these pests and lays an egg in each one. When the egg hatches it feeds on the larva within the egg. Then they emerge and start the process all over again.

I bet you didn't realize what a drama was going on in your garden every day. Much better than watching TV.

Praying Mantis

I love watching praying mantis. These insects are huge in the bug world. They are called praying mantis, because of the posture of the front legs. The front legs are folded over and are held in front of the insect in a praying fashion.

They are super bug eliminators. They will eat whatever they can catch. I have read that they have been seen catching a hummingbird, but I am not sure about that.

If you have praying mantis in your yard you will know it. They are huge bugs, up to 6 inches long.

Their egg cases are a brownish grey and can be found on shrubs and low vegetation. If you find one please leave it alone. They do not do well in captivity. Let Mother Nature take its course.

Beneficial Nematodes

Nematodes are more like a worm than a bug, and you will never see one. They live in the soil killing the pests that live there.

They feed on larvae, caterpillars, grubs, and maggots. As you can see their food choices are wide, so that is good for us.

If you have problems with bites and crooked roots of carrots you may have a problem that beneficial nematodes can help.

We will stop here. There are many other beneficial insects, but we can't list them all. The above are the main ones and ones that can be the most help to you in the garden.

Many of these beneficial insects can be purchased and released in your garden. Look in garden catalogs or search online for suppliers.

Tip 6

Stealth Plants

What the heck is a stealth plant? That is a plant that is, in some way, hard for those little pests to find.

No, you do not have to hide your vegetables all over the yard. There are a couple of ways that I know that work to some degree.

There is a product sold by garden some catalogs, <http://www.gardensalive.com> was the first one I found, called Surround. It is a clay based product that you can spray on your plant and it masks the plant from insects with clay film, kinda' like a radar jammer.

Surround was first made for fruits, but I have used it on green beans and potatoes with fair success. If you get a lot of rain you will want to re-spray, but I have found that it last an amazingly long time.

Not only do you get pest protection, but it protects against sunburn and heat stress.

It is non-toxic, you just wash off the clay when you harvest.

Another trick for keeping plants pest free is to use guard plants...not to be confused with guard dogs.

A guard plant is on that confuses or hides the normal pest for its companion plant.

An example would be marigold. The flower marigold is repugnant to many insects, no wonder the way it smells. You just interplant marigold with your other vegetables and they will help keep the pest load down for those vegetables.

