



## Preventing Pests In the Home Garden



At one time or another most home garden plants are affected by insects or diseases. The key to successful gardening is to take steps to prevent problems. It's also important to know which insects and diseases are real problems, and check your plants regularly to see if pests are building up.

Whether you have a lawn, annual flowers, perennial landscape plants, home vegetable garden or fruit trees and bushes the following general gardening tips will help keep your garden healthy and problem-free.

### 1. Choose the right plants for the conditions in your garden.

Select sun-loving plants for hot dry sites and shade-loving plants for shady areas and heavily wooded lots. Choose plants, especially trees, shrubs and perennials (plants that come back year after year like rhubarb and delphinium), that are resistant or tolerant to the pest problems common in your area. Your local nursery or garden center staff can help you with this.

### 2. Start with good quality seed and healthy plants.

Bargain plants are not a bargain if they have been mistreated. Avoid buying plants that look wilted, damaged or unhealthy.

### 3. Keep 'em' healthy.

Healthy plants can resist attack from insects and diseases and compete better with weeds. Keep lawns and garden plants healthy by providing good growing conditions. Most plants need about 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water per week and benefit from a little fertilizer each year. Home-made compost, well rotted manure or organic fertilizers are great for building the soil. Most plants do well in soil with a pH from 5.8 to 6.5. Test the soil every 2-3 years to ensure the fertility level and pH are within an acceptable range.

### 4. Keep weeds in check.

Weeds compete with the lawn and garden plants for light, water and nutrients. In the garden, weeds can promote disease and insect problems. Prevent garden weeds by mulching the soil surface with shredded bark, straw, hay or other organic materials. This helps conserve soil moisture too. On the lawn, mowing the grass at a height of 5 -7.5 cm ( 2-3 inches ) can reduce weeds by 50-80 percent.

### 5. Practice good "garden keeping".

Stop plant diseases from spreading by removing damaged plants and plant parts when you see them. Don't put the diseased plants in your backyard compost pile. Home composters aren't hot enough to kill disease-causing organisms. You may just spread the problem with the finished compost. The same is true for weeds that have gone to seed - feed those to your curbside green cart. In the fall, do a thorough garden clean-up to get rid of over-wintering insects and disease-causing organisms.

### SORTING OUT THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

There are literally thousands of species of insects in the average home garden but only a few are harmful. Generally, each plant in your garden will only be attacked by a few specific insects and diseases. Learning about these pests and the factors that promote them will go a long way to helping you manage your pest problems. Garden centers, gardening books and provincial government web sites can be good sources of information on common local pest problems and their management.