

EAT. LEARN. LIVE. AND GROW

PEST CONTROL TIPS FOR SCHOOL GARDEN PROGRAMS

Don't let unwanted visitors like insect and disease pests hamper your school garden program. Begin by employing proper cultural controls to support healthy plant growth. If pests sneak past these initial defenses, fight back with mechanical controls that target specific problems with minimal environmental impact. Finally, only if damage becomes overwhelming and with school approval, consider using an organic pesticide. Here are some key pest control tips to keep in mind:

GARDEN PRACTICES TO BOOST PLANT HEALTH AND DECREASE PEST POPULATIONS:

- Keep plants healthy by carefully preparing the soil and keeping plants well-watered and properly fertilized.
- Choose the right plants for your conditions. Plant fruiting crops in full sun (6-8 hours/day), roots crops in part sun (3-4 hours/day) and greens in part shade (2-3 hours/day).
- Practice crop rotation. Make sure not to plant the same family of veggies in the same bed for 3 years.
- Choose pest resistant varieties. Check seed catalog descriptions and plants labels to see if varieties are resistant to diseases and insects common in your area.
- Plant for diversity. Planting vegetables, herbs and flowers together can attract beneficial insects to the garden.
- Identify the problem. Carefully investigate any damage to make sure it is being caused by a pest and not by another condition such as weather.
- Decide if the damage is a problem. Many plants can withstand some damage and still produce an adequate harvest.
- Protect beneficial insects. Make sure you can identify the "good guys and the bad guys" in the garden.

MECHANICAL CONTROLS WHEN INSECT AND DISEASE PESTS BECOME A PROBLEM:

- Handpick and destroy pests. Make sure to positively identify a pest first and to check back regularly to keep damage under control.
- Create barriers. Use floating row covers, netting, fences and mulch to keep diseases, animals and insects away from your crops.
- Set traps and use repellents. Use yellow sticky cards, pheromone traps and homemade traps to lure and kill pests such as cucumber beetles, Japanese beetles and slugs. When using repellents for animals, make sure to rotate through different sprays for maximum effectiveness.

PESTICIDE CONTROLS AS A LAST RESORT:

*Before considering use of pesticide, always check your school and/or district policy on spraying around the school grounds. Chemical controls available include:

- **Organic Sprays** – Remember, organic sprays are still poisons and should be handled carefully.
- **Targeted Sprays** – Some pesticides are designed to only kill very specific pests. Although preferable, keep in mind that even these controls may harm beneficial insects so use them carefully.
- **Broad Spectrum Sprays** – Avoid using broad spectrum sprays that kill many different types of insects. These may cause long-term harm to the garden as they upset the ecological balance.

