

## Garden and Landscape Pests

Distribute 10-12-2017

Cabbage loopers, web worms, mosquitoes, and fire ants, are prevalent pests in our landscapes this month.

If you have planted cabbage, broccoli, and other greens by transplant, it is automatic that cabbage loopers will show up to feed on the foliage. The plants need to be examined each day and at first appearance of holes in the foliage they should be treated with a Bt product if you want to preserve the leaves and growth rate. It is easy to verify that the damage is being caused by cabbage loopers if you make a quick search under the leaves that show the damage. Cabbage loopers are small (to begin with) slender green caterpillars that form a loop when they move.

Bt is available under many brand names including Thuricide, Monterey, Dipel, Bio-worm Killer, and Safer Caterpillar Killer. It is an extract from a bacteria that when consumed by caterpillars causes them to stop feeding almost immediately, and die within a few days. Note that the Bt must be consumed as part of the leaves that the caterpillars are eating. It is a very effective control but only for 5-7 days. In 2 or 3 weeks it may have to be reapplied if a new set of loopers hatch.

In addition to cabbage loopers you may have web worms on your pecans or fruit trees. As the name indicates these caterpillars feed on the leaves under the shelter of a web they weave as they move up the tree.

Bt is effective in controlling webworms if you can reach the feeding area and penetrate the web. The first step is often to destroy the web with a bamboo cane or another tool. In the old days 50 foot pecans could be sprayed but it is usually not practical or welcomed by the neighbors in residential neighborhoods. Even spraying with the organic Bt product is an issue because a general spray may affect other butterfly caterpillars.

If the webs are too high to reach with a cane pole, you may just have to leave them. If you can reach the webs, however, just the act of opening them makes the webworms susceptible to feeding by beneficial wasps. They can find the ripped web very quickly and begin removing the caterpillars.

The rain has been wonderful but it means our landscapes are producing mosquitoes. The bites are annoying but the threat of the bites spreading diseases is real. To begin your control program empty all containers that collect water. Pour the water on your plants if it is convenient but the important thing is to remove all standing water. Old pet dishes, toys, tires, tools, and basins will produce mosquito larvae. Water features with running water are not an issue because the larvae need stagnant water to develop. Bird baths are emptied through bird splashing and evaporation every day so are also not an issue.

Secondly, containers with useful standing water like water barrels for irrigation can be treated with a mosquito dunk or even a very small amount of cooking oil works to suffocate the larvae. For adult mosquitoes hiding in plant thickets you may have to spray with a labeled insecticide such as malathion. Be discriminating and target in your spraying and follow label instructions closely.

The rain has forced the fire ants to redo their mounds and the hills have become visible. Raised beds and containers are favored sites for new hills. The ants are aggressive in the defense of the mounds.

Treat fire ant mounds that directly interfere with your gardening or other activities with a fast-acting treatment. My favorite products have acephate as an active ingredient but if you check the labels and are willing to follow somewhat more demanding treatment procedures, organic products are also available. Use a bait such as Amdro for a general treatment over the whole landscape. The material can be spread very thinly as per the label instructions and is effective after about 2 weeks.