

Pest Issues

Distribute 05-17-2018

Fire ants are an issue in many landscapes and they can be a problem in the vegetable garden, especially if you grow okra.

To control fire ants in the landscape, use a two-step method. Apply a product such as "Surrender" with acephate as the active ingredient to the ant mounds that are near your activities. Acephate products are usually applied directly to the mound. Follow label instructions. It is very fast acting. Within a few hours the mound can be devoid of live fire ants. For the rest of the landscape apply a bait such as "Amdro". The material is spread thinly over a large area. The ants carry it back to their mound and within about two weeks the area mounds are out of action.

Controlling fire ants in the vegetable garden is more complex. It is true that the "Amdro" applied over the landscape may end up controlling the mounds that provide ants to the garden but if you want faster action, there are several tactics to consider. If fire ants are on your okra plants when you are trying to harvest the pods, you may want to spray them off with a stream of water from the hose. It works to temporarily remove the biting pests.

There are also organic fire ant control products such as "Come and Get It", a bait with spinosad as the active ingredient, that can be spread in the garden itself. Treatments with bifenthrin and spinosad also exist that can be applied to fire ant mounds in the garden. Follow label instructions.

The addition of milkweeds to the landscape of area gardeners to benefit butterflies, has led to an interesting situation. All the milkweed species seem to support an orange colored aphid and a box-elder type bug. Based on phone and email inquiries, these insects bother some gardeners. It is true that they are feeding on the milkweed plants, but the primary reason to plant the milkweeds is to provide a nectar source and egg-laying site for Monarch and Queen butterflies. Vigorous growth by the milkweeds is desirable but, the main idea is not necessarily to maximize milkweed plant growth. The application of any type of insecticide would threaten the butterflies more than the aphids do, so it is best just to ignore the aphids and milkweed bugs. The ladybugs and other beneficial insects will move in to provide some control and you could squash some aphids by hand if it makes you feel better, for the good of the butterflies, insecticide sprays should not be used on the milkweed.

If you are growing peaches and tomatoes, the chances are high that the ripening fruit is attracting leaf-footed bugs and other stink bugs. They inject their digestive juice into the fruit and then consume the resultant stew. The pests are mobile and large, so they require an insecticide that is relatively potent. In my experience the most effective control is accomplished if you use Sevin or malathion. Sevin is being removed from the market soon, but remaining stock at area nurseries can be purchased. Malathion seems to be equally effective. Follow label instructions.

Mosquitos are especially prevalent this spring. The main control tactic is to eliminate all standing water. Empty old pails, wheel barrows and dog dishes after every rain. Add mosquito donuts to rain barrels that aren't sealed and to water features where there is not enough moving water to prevent the production of mosquito larvae. Often you can identify the source of your mosquitos as a damp plant

thicket or even a rainwater catchment storage tank and apply a targeted spray of malathion to the area. One of the best strategies is to confer with your pest control contractor to come up with a reasonable control plan that does not involve excessive insecticide sprays.

The Twenty First Annual Festival of Flowers Event is this Saturday ,May 26th from 9am until 5pm at a new location 1948 Austin Highway at the Austin Highway Event Center. The location has changed but the event still features the plant exchange, free xeriscape plants from SAWS, many gardening exhibits and presentations. All your favorite horticulturists will be available to answer your gardening questions.