

Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, May 2021



The Garden Diary: What's Bugging You?

Did you know there are 200,000,000 insects for every man, woman, and child on earth? Yes, that is 200 million for each of us! Insects will always outnumber us. That is the bad news.

The good news is that most bugs are either beneficial or benign, having no noticeable impact on our lives. We rarely give the good bugs credit for the work they do. Bees and butterflies pollenate our plants. Tiny parasitic wasps lay eggs on larger insects and kill them in the process. Praying mantises kill beetles and spiders in large numbers. Ladybugs are voracious eaters of mealy bugs and scale. Spiders dine on flies and other troublesome insects.



Now what about the bad insects in our world? We generally try to kill them. We swat flies. We use bug zappers on mosquitoes. We put flea collars on our pets. We use soapy water to rid houseplants of insects. These are desirable ways to get rid of bad insects.

Spraying or spreading insecticides over our properties MAY BE a bad response to ridding ourselves of unwanted bugs. Insecticides generally kill the good insects along with the bad. They may harm other creatures on your property, including birds, pets, and family members.

What alternatives to harmful insecticides and pesticides are available to us?

Stop bugs BEFORE they become a problem:

1. Clean up weeds and standing water in your yard which host insects.
2. Keep your plants healthy. A healthy plant has its own defenses against many predators.
3. Don't over-fertilize. Too much fertilizer creates weak growth which attracts insects.
4. Be sure plants receive adequate water. Too little water stresses plants and attracts insects.
5. If bugs are large enough to hand pick, squish them or put them in a jar of soapy water.
6. Use a garden hose to spray off other insects.
7. Create an oasis for birds and butterflies since birds and other bugs are the worst enemies of bad bugs.

Ultimately you may need to use a pesticide. Opt for an organic product whenever possible. Follow directions on the package carefully, measure carefully, protect yourself with rubber gloves and mask, launder clothes, and discard any unused product as instructed on their packaging.

Here's a helpful link:

New York Magazine: [The Best \(Nontoxic\) Pesticides and Insecticides, According to Gardeners](#)

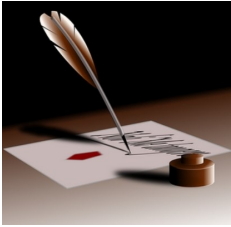
If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email us at:

communications@rockportgardenclub.org

Happy debugging!

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Letter to the Editor:

Why say “No” to synthetic pesticides?

Sarah Little, former Pesticide Awareness Coordinator for the Town of Wellesley, who worked with the MA DEP on pesticide use reduction, provided us this article on the hazards of synthetic chemical pesticides.

Pesticides are broadly defined as anything used to kill, repel or mitigate pests. Examples are insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and rodenticides. It is important to know that 1) pesticides are designed to be poisonous, 2) their hazards are not fully known, and 3) there are healthier, cheaper and more effective ways to manage most pests.

What do we know about toxicity of these chemicals?

We know some things, like how much of an active ingredient 100 rats can eat and only kill 50 of them; how many birth defects will occur in 100 pregnant rats fed the amount of active ingredient that the EPA expects will get into your food and water; which aquatic organisms will be killed; and several other biological and chemical proxies. The EPA doesn't prohibit a pesticide based on these findings, they regulate the labeling of the pesticide, give it a registration number, and allow it on the market. Anyone who isn't following the label will be at higher-than-acceptable risk as far as the EPA is concerned, as well as being in violation of the law.

If someone follows the label will they and the environment be risk-free?

No. The EPA does not test each product in humans (thank goodness), but relies on years of use out in the public followed by epidemiological research into poisonings, birth defects and environmental harm, before deciding to remove it from the market. At this point they are fought by industry, not surprisingly, who has invested tremendous amounts of money in its manufacturing and distribution. It routinely takes 25-50 years to remove a product that was found to have been harmful all along. This article on pesticide regulation in different countries gives a picture of the situation:

[The USA lags behind other agricultural nations in](#)

[banning harmful pesticides](#)

What about the toxicity of combinations of these chemicals?

We will never know which combinations of herbicide, fungicide, and insecticide are causing damage to human or environmental health. It is mathematically impossible to study all the interactions between the over 500 different active pesticide ingredients legal in the U.S. in our lifetimes. Especially if they cause cancer, which can take 20 years to appear.

What about the “inert” ingredients listed on the label, what are they?

Most pesticide products have proprietary "inert" ingredients, which are neither inert nor non-toxic, but simply don't act on the target organism (as defined by law). These products include chemicals such as fillers, synergists, surfactants, and preservatives that are toxic to humans. These risks are unknowable to the consumer.

How can I learn more about toxicity of specific chemicals?

For regulatory and toxicity information of individual chemicals or products:

Items marked with "PAN Bad Actor" are known to be problematic.

<https://www.pesticideinfo.org/>

Links between specific chemicals and specific diseases; [a great resource.](#)

How does one ultimately understand the risks involved?

The task of analyzing the risk of short and long term toxicity and chemical interactions of each product in one's garage is a difficult, if not impossible task. A simple "no thanks" to using pesticides is an appealing alternative, especially when simple, organic, integrated pest management techniques offer a great way forward to a beautiful garden, yard, and local environment.

Sarah Little is the author of "[Introduction to Organic Lawns and Yards.](#)

Take care,
Sarah



The Garden Cart:

Haas Halo Hydrangea

As you might have guessed, we're trying to steer you towards native plants. Here's one that won the Pennsylvania Gold Medal and looks like a winner following the great presentation on Hydrangeas last month.

We all love the mophead hydrangeas, but they are all show. The flowers are technically colored up sepal. They don't produce reproductive structures or pollen. They offer little, if anything, to pollinators.



Here in North America there are at least four pollinating hydrangeas to choose from - the smooth Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*), the ashy Hydrangea (*Hydrangea cinerea*), the oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), and the silver-leaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea radiata*).

Haas Halo is a smooth hydrangea lacecap hydrangea that the White Flower Farm deems "remarkable." It produces giant flowers over 14" wide that are favorites of honey bees. It has sturdy stems, and is slow to wilt in hot, dry spells. Spent flowers provide winter interest.

This one will be covered with bees and butterflies.

Attributes:

Height: 2-5 feet

Spread: 3-5 feet

Hardiness: 3-9

Color: White

Exposure: Morning Sun, Afternoon Shade

Soil Moisture: Average

Maintenance: Low

Ecoregion: Eastern US

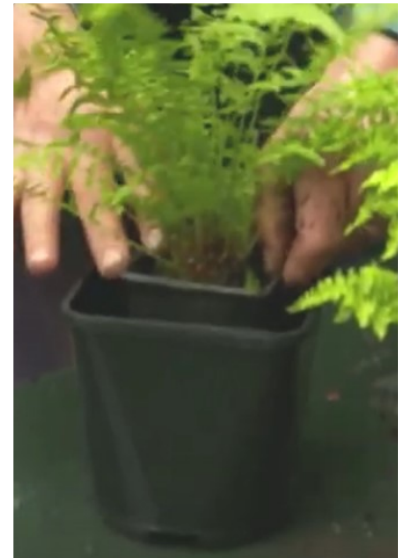
Bloom: Jul-Sep

—Lisa Simms

Tips 'n Tricks

Planting in a Perfect Hole

This Monty Don trick is a winner and will change the way you plant in pots and your garden. Place your new plant inside your new pot while it's still in its container. Add new soil and tamp it down lightly. Remove the new plant and you'll see a perfect hole! Unpot and pop it in. You may want to tease or slice the roots a bit, but try to keep the new plant's form consistent with the hole. Voilà.



Garden Calendar:

Member Meeting Starting Early

Monday, May 3rd

12:00: Mingle

12:30: Business Meeting!

1:00: Speaker:

Rebecca Warner

"Thinking Globally, Acting in Your Own Backyard"

[ZOOM Meeting Link](#)

