

Going Buggy by Fran Benton

This cold spring we are having is just madness but also kind of funny. It gives us all a chance to complain bitterly about the weather. Those of us who propagate plants have big backups in the greenhouse, as it's too cold to put plants out. The tulips are still blooming as well as the odd daffodil... and its mid spring!

The great joy we should celebrate is that BUG season has not started yet. In nature the big green rush of spring is always followed by the big brown rush of bug life. Yes I know they are technically called insects but in my house they are referred to as bugs. And not by me. In manspeak a beehive is a box of bugs, and ant mound is a hill of bugs, a spider web is, well the expletives over that we will just skip. Personally I love insects and can't wait to see what nature flings out for us to see this year. Last year it was the attack of the giant bugs (June beetles everywhere), the year before it was clouds of tiny bugs (baby spiders riding past holding onto their first webs, and god only knows what kind of bugs we will experience this year. Secretly, honestly I would like to see a murder hornet, But not in my yard, maybe someone's yard in Nanaimo. The granddaddy of all bugs was in our yard several years ago, a giant bark beetle. I am not kidding; this thing was 2 inches long and hissed at you. The larva is almost as long and you would swear it came from the African savannah. It was so big it scared the cat! Mr. Handsome referred to this beetle as a giant mother bug. And then he went inside, as it was simply all too much bugginess for him.



Last week I was at the local garden centre and I was looking at the wall of insecticides. I sighed and thought how frustrating this all was because we shell out buckets of money to kill insects and sometimes it just doesn't work. For example: APHIDS. I really am amazed by the way aphids live. Do you know an aphid can be sucking the juice out of your plant's stems and popping baby aphids out the rear at the same time? Aphids are parthenogenetic, meaning they don't need males to produce babies. What? Yes, aphids, bees, ants, some sharks and lizards can reproduce this way! Aphids produce hundreds of babies each day. This



can make a big mess out of your plants! Best insecticide for aphids? No insecticide, squish them and use gentle jets of water to hose them off and clean your hands. I find the insecticidal soaps often damage the plant and other sprays end up killing all the beneficial insects. You can use pyrethrum, the product of chrysanthemums, but does it really help? If you can catch the infestation before it multiplies you can remove the stems that are affected.

Bag and bin them, no composting!

I must tell you about one of the best bugs I've found in years. I like dirt a lot and was digging up something for who knows what reason

when I turned out a big spider. Not just any spider, this dude was a five-alarm monster beast! As I scooped him up for a look I realized this was unusual and grabbed my camera and took a picture. A short riffle through a big book of bugs turned up his identity – he was a trapdoor spider! Although unusual, trapdoor spiders are not that uncommon here. We just rarely get to see them. I guess I dug up his burrow and trapdoor too. Sorry about that buddy! Happy gardening, and remember to relax and watch for bugs!