

Preventing Pests in Your Home

Pesticide products are common items in many households. In fact, we may not realize what products are considered to be pesticides. What exactly is a pesticide? A pesticide is a chemical agent developed to kill or repel living organisms that we consider to be pests – weeds, insects, bacteria, and fungi, to name a few. Therefore, home and garden weed killers bug killers, and even disinfectants are pesticides. Some detergents and paints contain pesticides.

Think about your household. What pesticides do you use? Are they properly stored to prevent leakage? Are they used and disposed of with caution? Are they out of reach of children? Are there alternatives to the pesticides that you use in your home? What can you do to reduce your exposure to chemicals? How can you help prevent pollution?

The best solution to a problem is not to create the problem. This is where prevention methods are important. Many plants, insects, and other animals that we refer to as pests are attracted to food, water, and shelter that we unintentionally provide for them. If we learn what the pest is attracted to, we can modify the environment to make it inhospitable. The following are some general prevention methods that can be implemented in the home, lawn and garden as alternative pest control measures.

- **REMOVE WATER SOURCES.**

All pests need water for survival. Fix leaky plumbing and do not let water accumulate or stagnate anywhere in your home. This means no water in trays under your houseplants overnight, especially if you have a cockroach infestation.

- **REMOVE FOOD SOURCES.**

Store food in sealed containers. Keep counters and cabinets clear of crumbs and standing water. Avoid leaving your pet's food out for extended periods of time. Place non-recyclable garbage in tightly covered containers. Rinse out recyclables (i.e. aluminum cans, glass and plastic bottles, and steel cans).

- **REMOVE OR DESTROY PEST SHELTERS.**

Caulk cracks and crevices to control cockroaches. Remove piles of wood from under or around your home to avoid attracting termites. Repair window and door screens. Remove and dispose of diseased plants, tree prunings and fallen fruit that might harbor pests.

- **REMOVE BREEDING SITES.**

Pet manure attracts flies, litter encourages rodents and standing water provides a perfect breeding place for mosquitoes. Discard or compost pet manure, keep areas in and around the home free of clutter and remove standing water in the home and yard (overturned buckets and wheelbarrows, repair leaky faucets and pipes, keep gutters and downspouts free of debris for proper drainage).

- **USE PREVENTATIVE HORTICULTURAL PRACTICES.**

Choose native plants that are naturally better suited for the adapted to the local climate and resistant to pest populations and disease. Use the natural insect repelling properties of certain plants to keep pests away.

- **REMOVE SOURCES OF PREVENTABLE STRESS TO PLANTS.**

Plant at the optimum time of year. Use mulch to reduce weed competition and maintain even soil temperature and moisture. Do not over water your lawn or other plants. Over watering can result in disease, may provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and stresses the grass and other plants. Make sure there is proper drainage and aeration. Over fertilization stresses grass and other plants.

- **KNOW YOUR PESTS.**

Use photographic or illustrated guides to identify the pest and its natural predators. Guides can be found at your local library or gardening supply store. Learn the life cycles of pests and beneficial organisms. Be able to identify the pests and beneficial organisms during the various stages (i.e. eggs, larvae, juvenile and adult). Monitor pests, and if control is necessary, target the pest during the most vulnerable stage in its life cycle. Continually practice the general prevention methods.

- **DEVELOP A PEST MANGEMENT STRATEGY.**

Remember that no method is 100% effective, even pesticides. Long term strategies such as habitat modification or general prevention may take longer to reduce the pest population initially, but are commonly more effective once the pests are under control. Maintaining a natural balance in your home and yard will reduce your exposure to potentially hazardous chemicals and may provide a welcome habitat for insect eating birds and other beneficial insects and other animals.