Bugs, Bunnies, & Blight: Organic Pest and Disease Management
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Bugs

The most commonly found insects in the garden this summer were squash beetles, earwigs, slugs and cucumber beetles. They all can strip a vulnerable plant of leaves or pass on bacterial infections.

Diatomaceous Earth

- Sedimentary rock ground into white powder
- Dehydrates exoskeletons of insects
- Sprinkled around plants

The garden was too wet this summer for diatomaceous earth to make a difference, because you must re-apply after every rainfall.

Traps

- Earwigs: low-sided tin cans filled with fish oil, molasses, and water
- Earwigs: Rolled up newspaper left overnight and shaken into soapy water
- Slugs: small cups of beer
- Squash beetles & cucumber beetles: Hand-picked off leaves

We successfully caught earwigs in tin cans and slugs in beer, but were unable to trap earwigs in newspaper.

Bunnies

The rabbits in the garden are most likely eastern cottontails. Very few crops - including corn, tomatoes, peppers, squash – are resistant to being nibbled on by rabbits while they are sprouting.

Bone Meal

- Processed bones ground into a fine powder
- Rabbits are not interested in smell of bone meal

We no longer had a rabbit problem after sprinkling bone meal around all the beds and plots.

Raised Beds

- Helps deter insects and rabbits
- 4-5 inches of compost, well-rotted manure, leaf mold or another organic matter worked into the topsoil of beds
- Healthier plants withstand insects and rabbits

BUG is transitioning to wire beds, which are easier to move and build. Rabbits did not appear to get into the wire beds.

Fencing

- Fencing over 2 feet high prevents large animals from jumping into garden
- Dug into ground to deter burrowing
- Holes less than 3-inches wide to deter rabbits

A reinforced fence that was staked into the ground kept rabbits from getting into the two big plots.

Blight

There are 3 main types of tomato blight in Wisconsin: early blight, late blight, and septoria. All diseases thrive in periods of moderate temperature and high rainfall. Initial infection occurs on lower leaves and is passed upward as spores from infected leaves are splashed onto foliage.

Avoid Composting Leaves

- Early blight pathogens can overwinter in seeds or soil for a year, septoria can survive for up to 3 years
- Prevent spread by not composting tomato leaves or other nightshades (such as potatoes)

The tomato plants that were planted on soil that had never been used before show no signs of blight. We do not compost tomato leaves.

Watering

- Reduce wetting with drip tape
- Plant in sunlight or windy areas to help dry leaves

BUG employs drip hose around the tomato plants and uses hay mulch to keep the base of the plants moist.

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References