

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian

Bug Out!

By Cynthia Brian

“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.” ~ Albert Einstein

Df 60 is the new 40, golden is the new green, and driving a dirty car is the sign of being environmentally correct, it’s time to talk about what’s really bugging us. With the drought, many homeowners are experiencing an invasion of uninvited insects and varmints hungry to eat what’s left of our crops while some are dining on us as main courses.

Although many of the insects such as lady beetles, ground beetles, lacewings, praying mantis, and predatory nematodes that visit our gardens are beneficial biologicals, the ones that we want to bug out are the bugs (arachnids, arthropods, and other entomological species) that bother, interfere, destroy and traumatize.

ANTS

Ants in the garden are actually dining on the sweet honeydew made by mealybugs and aphids. Although some species of ants feed on soft plant tissue or seeds, you’ll usually find ants crawling up and down plants where they are herding colonies of aphids or mealybugs. If you grow artichokes, you’ve probably witnessed ants infesting the chokes. Armies of ants on the kitchen counter in summer are scream-able. Make a tea of cayenne pepper, lemon rind, mint, rosemary and clove. Spray on the soil ... and in your kitchen.

FRUIT FLIES

Stone fruit like apricots, peaches, plums, prunes and nectarines are ripe and ready right now. Whether you buy them at the farmers’ market or grow them in your backyard, if left in the fruit bowl, fruit flies will appear. The eggs could be in the fruit, or the flies could be flying in through an open window or door. Fruit flies are just a nuisance doing little harm except being annoying. Keep your compost bucket outside and covered during the summer. If they are bothering you indoors, add vinegar, wine, and a piece of any fruit to a bowl. Cover tightly with foil. Punch holes in the foil and watch them drown!

TICKS

Ticks are not going to damage your garden, but they could cost you a trip to the emergency room or hospital. Ticks attach themselves to the fur and feathers of animals and birds. Often they reside on grasses or brush and hop onto a warm-blooded creature where dinner awaits. As gardeners, hikers or animal lovers, ticks are a common problem. Wearing long

sleeves, removing clothing, and washing hair after being outdoors may help in the prevention of tick bites. However, because of the possibility of Lyme disease or a severe allergic reaction, it’s best to see a medical professional immediately when bit. If you remove the tick, make sure to save it in a jar for identification.

MOSQUITOES

Buzzing bloodsuckers, these tiny vampires wreak havoc on humans. They are considered “public enemy number one” in the fight against global infectious diseases. Interestingly, only the female has the mouthparts to suck our blood, homing in on exhaled carbon dioxide, certain body odors, heat and movement. The itchiness you feel after a bite is an allergic reaction to the saliva. The only good news about these vectors is that birds, frogs, bats, turtles and dragonflies eat them in the garden. Empty any standing water as they breed rapidly, slather on the DEET, and when outdoors, plug in a large fan to blow them away. Planting citronella on the patio may help.

APHIDS

These true bugs puncture plant tissue and suck the juice, attacking our peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots and many flowering plants. They prefer to be upwind in a garden and often are herded by ants. Overfeeding with nitrogen encourages aphid infestation as they eat new growth. Aphids multiply rapidly. Spray with water mixed with dishwashing detergent and use row covers on crops.

EARWIGS

It’s a myth that the name was derived because these pinchers drilled into the ears of sleeping humans, burrowing into their brains. They are omnivores who tunnel into fruit and bulbs as well as dine on lettuce, potatoes, roses, zinnias, artichokes, corn and many other plants. Make traps out of small cardboard boxes baited with a piece of meat and oil. They’ll hide at night and you’ll get them in the morning. Despite nibbling on plants, they do help gardeners by devouring other predatory insects.

With the California drought a reality, expect more intruders into your landscape pillaging, biting and sucking. Get creative with natural tonics and use your imagination to keep the stinging, nibbling and gnawing at bay. Enjoy the coming attractions of summer!

Happy Gardening and Happy Growing!



Prunes and apricots along with herbs make a great summer gift.

Photos Cynthia Brian



Vetch adds natural nitrogen to the soil without overdoing while tangling with the euphorbia.



Red dahlia