

Pests in the Garden and Landscape

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Landscapes and gardens are prospering in the San Antonio area because of the generous rains and mild temperatures. The pests that rely on the plant growth are also active. Here are a few pests and control tactics to consider.

If you planted the recommended varieties and are fertilizing the plants, tomatoes are responding with fast growth and fruit setting. You may also be seeing some leaf-footed bugs. In the stink bug complex they can do considerable damage to fruit by injecting their digestive juices into the fruit and then feeding on the resultant "soup". The result is that the tomatoes become bumpy and tough skinned. They still can be eaten but are not as appetizing as fruit without the damage. Stink bugs are tough to control. The only pesticide that has worked for me is a Sevin spray. For an organic control you can try to hand collect as many as possible.

Peaches are also subject to stink bug damage. If you have not been spraying every week since petal fall with Sevin it may be too late to prevent the damage from the stink bugs. Plum curculios, a fruit boring insect have also been active. Include a fungicide such as Captan in the weekly spray to prevent brown rot.

This has been the spring of the fire ant, their mounds are everywhere including in containers and raised bed gardens. Outside the vegetable garden apply a fast acting insecticide such as acephate to quickly eliminate mounds that are interfering in your daily activities. It can be used for mounds in containers that are not producing food plants. For a general control apply a bait such as Amdro to your yard. It will take a few weeks but if you follow the recommendations on the container, a small amount of the bait will reduce fire ant mounds over a wide area. In the vegetable garden seek out one of the organic fire ant controls with an active ingredient such as Spinosad. Make sure the label allows application near vegetables and follow the instructions closely.

With the generous rains and lush foliage slugs and snails are prospering. They are feeding on low growing flowers such as begonias and some not so low growing such as coleus, zinnias, and snapdragons. In the vegetable garden they will feed on beans, vine crops and of course, any greens still producing. Apply a granular slug and snail bait around the edge of the garden. There are both organic and manufactured products. One organic option that is effective, and really illustrates how thick the pests are in the garden is to use a beer trap. Sink paper or plastic cups level with the soil surface in the affected garden bed every 3 feet and half fill them with beer. Slugs, snails, and pill bugs will be attracted to the beer and accumulate in the cups. The pests don't seem to care if the beer is fresh, stale, expensive or cheap!

Many gardeners in the San Antonio area have planted tropical and native milkweeds to provide nectar and an egg-laying site for Monarch butterflies. If you have milkweeds it is likely that you have yellow aphids on the stems. The aphids seem to do minimal damage suck fluids from the plants and are fed upon by wasps and lady bugs (both adults and larvae). If the aphids bother you the best control strategy is to spray them off with a water hose. Applying an insecticide or even soapy water could be a problem for the Monarch and Queen caterpillars that are feeding on the plants. Remember that plants such as

milkweed can be planted for their wildlife value, and some damage, or even a lot of damage, can be tolerated if the targeted wildlife is benefitting.