

Protecting your plants

Whilst it is advisable to minimize the use of pesticides where possible, sometimes the threat to plant quality and yield justifies the need to treat with either a conventional pesticide or, if you prefer, one based on natural ingredients (for details of the latter please see our leaflet on products for the organic gardener). When choosing a pesticide ALWAYS check on the label that it is suitable for the pest you wish to control and for the plant or plants upon which it is going to be used. If you choose a concentrated pesticide try to only make up the quantity that you need to avoid wastage and contamination. If you only have a relatively small number of plants to treat choose a ready to use pesticide where there are no problems with mixing, wastage or disposal. Spray on a calm day either in the morning or early evening to minimize any harm to bees and other beneficial insects.

For some plants (e.g. roses and fruit trees), to get the best yield or performance, it may be advisable to spray as a preventative measure in order to prevent problems as, once pests or diseases take hold it can be either very difficult to get the better of them or, in the case of many fruit pests, too late to do much about it. **Roses** are a worthwhile addition to any garden, giving lasting colour throughout the summer and fragrance in many cases. However, they have a tendency to fall prey to various pests and diseases. To prevent this it is advisable to spray at intervals throughout the season (starting in early spring, when the first few pests are spotted) with a recommended insecticide and fungicide. Some products contain a combination of the two (e.g. Roseclear and Multirose), which saves time and effort.

Fruit and vegetables

Yields of **fruit** crops such as apples, pears, plums and other stone fruit and cane fruit can be significantly reduced through damage and spoilage via **insect pests**, particularly the larval stages. If you wish to have relatively blemish-free crops then it will be necessary to spray at key times, such as at bud burst and just after petal fall with a product such as Provado Ready-to-use Bug Killer which gives long lasting protection and is suitable for most fruit crops. It may be used on apples, pears, almond, cherries, cranberry, gooseberry, hazelnut, pear, plum, raspberry and currants and controls a broad range of pests including caterpillars, greenfly, black fly, sawfly, scale, mealy bug, whitefly and woolly aphid, among others. Other products that are suitable for use on fruit include Bug Free and Bugclear (apples, pears and strawberries) to control pests such as mites, caterpillars, greenfly, black fly and whitefly. Alternatively you could opt for an 'organic' product or one based on natural ingredients. For details of these and cultural ways to reduce fruit pests please see our factsheet 'Products suitable for use by organic gardeners'.

With respect to **disease** control only a few fungicides may be used on edible crops and they tend to be relatively specific in their action. Bordeaux Mixture may be used to prevent problems with diseases such as bacterial canker on cherries and plums and peach leaf curl, apple canker and potato and tomato blight. Systhane Fungus Fighter Concentrate gives good control of powdery mildew and scab on apples and pears and Dithane 945 will give protection against leaf spots, downy mildew, tomato and potato blight, apple scab, peach leaf curl and rust and may be used on a range of fruit and vegetables.

A range of pests including slugs and snails, greenfly, blackfly, leaf beetles, caterpillars and whitefly can attack vegetables. For details of what crops are likely to be attacked by various pests consult a good vegetable gardening book such as the Vegetable Expert to see what the pests look like. Pesticides which may be used on vegetables include Ultimate Bug Killer Ready-to-use (controls a wide range of pests and may be used on brassicas, lettuce, herbs and various greenhouse crops), Bug Free or Bugclear (which will control caterpillars, ants, aphids and whitefly and may be used on leafy brassicas, courgettes, cucumber, lettuce, peas, beans, pepper and tomatoes) and Ultimate Bug Killer which may be used on listed glasshouse crops.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

A lot can be done through providing good growing conditions (please see leaflet 'Growing Plants Successfully'). If plants have enough light for their needs and are growing in good soil with sufficient food, they will be better equipped to deal with pest attack, whereas sickly plants will tend to succumb more easily.

Garden hygiene is also important to help minimize problems with pests and diseases. Ensure that seed trays, pots and tubs are clean before using them and clear up garden debris regularly. If any plants are really badly infested with pests or diseases, it is best to remove them, as the problem is only likely to spread to other plants.

In vegetable plots pest problems may be reduced by practicing crop rotation. For full details of this either refer to a good vegetable growing book, such as 'The Vegetable and Herb Expert', or ask a member of staff in the garden centre.

Weed growth may be suppressed by using mulch around plants. A 5cm deep mulch of chipped or composted bark around the base of shrubs and roses will not only help to keep weeds at bay, it looks neat and will keep moisture in the soil. The best time to apply a mulch of this nature is in early spring, when the soil is moist and there are few weeds about. If the soil is dry at the time of applying mulch, water it well beforehand. Mulches can also be decorative – grit, shell and coloured aggregates look good, especially when used in pots and in smaller scale plantings, such as raised alpine beds etc.