

Not all insects need to be killed

Before setting out to control every six-legged critter in your landscape, take some time to identify what needs to be controlled. One of the ways of doing this is to bring a sample of the insect in question to our next Plant Clinic. The May Plant Clinic will take place May 28, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Fort Walton Beach at the Okaloosa County Extension building, 127 W. Hollywood Blvd.

The overuse of pesticides can result in a number of problems.

Insects can become resistant to insecticides when a product is repeatedly used. Because many insect species reproduce rapidly, having many generations per year, a resistant population can develop in a short time. This has happened in agriculture and in lawns and landscapes.

Pesticide overuse can make some pest problems worse. For example, insecticides containing carbaryl such as Sevin will kill many insects but will have little or no effect on aphids or spider mites. Repeated use of carbaryl will eliminate many beneficial insects that eat aphids and spider mites. As a result, misuse of carbaryl insecticides may result in larger populations of aphids and spider mites.

Indiscriminate use of broad-spectrum insecticides kills many insects, good and bad. Not all insects need to be killed. Less than one percent of all insects in Florida are damaging to plants. Many are beneficial. Beneficial insects are the “good guys” of the insect world. They feed on harmful insects. Once you’ve made the mistake of killing the good guys, such as lady beetles, you may have to increase the use of insecticides. This is because the good guys are no longer there to help reduce the harmful insects. Conversely, if you eliminate the bad insects, beneficial insects will not have anything to eat. Spraying every six-legged creature that exists is not a good idea. The overuse of pesticides can throw off the delicate, beneficial balance that exists in nature.

We have to tolerate a few pests and a little damage. Attempting to maintain a pest-free landscape is not only impractical but it is a waste of money and time and may be detrimental to the environment. And besides, the number of pesticides to choose from is becoming smaller, partly due to environmental concerns.

Instead of blanketing your landscape with pesticides, use some strategy. There are many other options such as choosing pest resistant plants, avoiding excess fertilization and watering, eliminating a plant that has to be frequently sprayed, eliminating small pest populations by hand, etc.

While pesticides remain part of our pest control arsenal, care should be taken to use them wisely and correctly.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, May 13, 2008