

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Garden-hood sauces

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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Ever since my young “garden-hood,” I have been a nontoxic type of gal—well, farmer, gardener, grower, landscaper, seed saver, and whatever else I am.

My mother was feeding her family organic food when most folks had no idea what that meant. For my mother, that meant no toxic spray on whatever we were ingesting, bubble gum and marbles excluded. Mother was not a farmer or a gardener or a weed plucker. She just knew, from much investigative reading, that toxic sprays on food were bad for the earth and bad for her children.

The gardeners in my family, primarily me but also my hubby, share the same organic, no-toxin code.

So what do we do about the bugs? As with most Applegate Valley gardeners, we encounter aphids, thrips, mites, snails, slugs, leafhoppers, mealybugs, scale bugs, spider mites, stinkbugs, white flies, caterpillars. Right? Many of us grow the same stuff (just guessing), so we have the same bugs.

Depart, creepy crawlers!

To make the creepy crawlers go away, start with the most basic of pest control: healthy soil. “Healthy soil is living soil, filled with billions of microbes and beneficial, microscopic fungi; nematodes, earthworms and other beneficial organisms,” says Eric Vinje, in an essay about soil health for the Planet Natural Resource Center. “It’s alive.”

You can also take advantage of a plant’s “friends,” or, in garden lingo, companion gardening. Smartpot.com explains how this works: “Companion planting is the practice of planting certain plants together to deter pests or attract beneficial insects. For example, marigolds are a great companion plant for tomatoes, as



Aphids don't like garlic or being squished. Photo: ecoguardpestmanagement.com.

they help to repel nematodes, which can damage tomato roots. Garlic and chives can also help to deter pests, while mint attracts beneficial insects like ladybugs, which eat aphids.”

In your kitchen and refrigerator you will find a number of nontoxic substances for helping control garden pests. Garlic, vinegar, beer, baking soda, borax, hot peppers, vegetable oil, and dish soap are among the most useful.

Maybe not in your kitchen but also useful are neem oil, diatomaceous earth, and pyrethrins. Neem oil comes from the seeds of the neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*), which contains azadirachtin, an active ingredient that repels and kills pests.

Diatomaceous earth is made from the fossilized remains of tiny, aquatic organisms called diatoms. It is not poisonous but works by absorbing the oils and fats from the insect’s exoskeleton so that the insect dries out and dies. “Pyrethrins are pesticides found naturally in some chrysanthemum flowers. They are a mixture of six chemicals that are



White flies don't like garlic either. Photo: gardenerbasics.com.

toxic to insects” (npic.orst.edu/factsheets/pyrethrins.html).

So, who doesn’t like what? What should you use on whom?

Aphids do not love or even like garlic, hot pepper spray, vegetable oil, dish soap, neem oil, pyrethrins, or me. I squish aphids.

White flies gravely dislike garlic, dish soap, neem oil, and pyrethrins. Slugs and snails don’t like garlic or vinegar. They actually love beer but get drunk and drown in a bowl of beer left out for them. Just kidding about drunk snails, but beer in a bowl does work.

Beetles. Okay, I’m not sure what kind of beetle I mean, and I know there are

hundreds of types, but if there are beetles on your plants, try getting rid of them with garlic, vegetable oil, or dish soap.

Go after ants with garlic, vinegar, baking soda, borax, or diatomaceous earth. Mealy bugs, mites, thrip, scale, leaf hoppers, and some nasty caterpillars—all or some of these hate all or some of these: pyrethrin, neem oil, dish soap, vegetable oil, and hot pepper spray.

If I had to use only one spray in my garden, garlic wins hands down. It is time-consuming to make but usually works. I blend, say, 24 cloves of garlic with a cup

of water. Then I filter the mash through a paper towel or paper coffee filter or something else that leaves the pulp behind. I put the liquid in a clean spray bottle and have a go at the creepies. Never mind that my garden may smell like a spaghetti sauce factory.

Words to you gardeners: (1) Do not spray in sunlight. (2) Experiment around, like adding liquid kitchen soap or cooking oil to garlic spray. (3) Try a very small area at a time. (4) Water your plants thoroughly, if needed, before you spray.

Dirty fingernails and all,
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