

GREEN

Organic gardening made easy

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their own. One such naturally-occurring pest deterrent is Pyrethrins, a chemical derived from the chrysanthemum plant. This chemical works wonders with preventative applications and to treat small insect infestations once they have erupted. A company called Concern is just one of the many manufacturers harnessing plant chemicals like Pyrethrins to help humans care for a variety of their rooted friends.

Another less-toxic option for insect control is a product from by Bonide called "All-Season Spray Oil." This product is actually a paraffin oil which covers plants with an oily coating light enough to be safe for the plant, but heavy enough to smother any manner of pests such as ants, aphids and caterpillars. Many gardeners know it as "dormant oil," a name derived from an earlier incarnation of the insecticide, which was decidedly thicker and oilier, and only recommended for application while plants were dormant. It has recently been lightened and can be applied whenever needed.

But what about those really destructive outdoor pests like gypsy moths, tomato worms and potato bugs? Is it possible to remove them from your plants, fences and outbuildings without harm-

ing everything around them, including yourself?

McGough's Lampton says "yes." One of their best-selling insecticides is called BT spray. BT stands for Bacillus Thuringen, also commonly called Dipel or Thuricide. It comes in many varieties, each one tailored to target a specific pest's larvae. BT spray will rid your yard of particular pests while they are in the larvae stage, without destroying any of the beneficial plants, insects and other living things around them.

At Barker Creek, Bertrand said that the emphasis is on the least toxic, most nature-derived products as possible.

"All these products that are out there today give people an option," said Bertrand. "You don't have to choose something whose primary ingredients were manufactured in a lab. You can choose a solution that has its basis in nature."

He also recommends substituting certain commonly-used products with less environmentally harsh choices that work just as well. Barker Creek sells organic garden lime, which is spread over too-acidic soil to neutralize it. They also offer organic garden sulfur, which lowers the PH of soil and promotes growth and a "dark-greening" of plants. Organic sulfur can be spread at the base of evergreens that have become dull with winter blight and will even turn hydrangeas from pink to blue. It's a safer alternative to the more commonly used aluminum sulfate.

such as renting a tent for the day."

The top three outdoor party tips from our professional planner Martel?

"Spray for bugs, weigh down paper products and provide portable toilet facilities," she said.

Outdoor parties feature food and this means insects. To encourage the right guests and discourage the wrong guests in your backyard, provide cans of insect repellent. Also, burn citronella candles to ward off mosquitoes; their glow will also enhance the mood of the outdoor party.

Since most outdoor parties feature lots of paper products — say banners, napkins and plates — you will want to plan a decorative way to hold them in place if an unexpected wind burst arrives from the bay. Use this opportunity to carry out your theme by selecting, say, a model car for a racing look or a potted flower for a sunflower motif.

As for the portable toilet, it offers a clean, convenient way to provide comfort to your guests. Homeowners gain the added bonus of eliminating the endless trekking to their bathroom and constant opening and closing of entry doors.

What is the most important advice Martel can give for your outdoor party?

"Make sure you turn off your automatic sprinkler system before the party!" she said.

Tom Tracey is a local freelance writer.

Barb Reneaud: Flower Power's 'green' thumb

BY ERIN ANDERSON
Special to the Record-Eagle

For the last three years, master gardener Barb Reneaud has been incorporating the principles of green gardening with the building of her Boardman Plains business south of Traverse City.

Maybe this is why an afternoon spent browsing at Flower Power feels a bit more like the chance to wander through someone's private outdoor retreat than visiting a garden center.

That's because Reneaud has strived to make Flower Power meld with its surroundings, the rows of

earth-bound flowers and potted plants seemingly a continuation of Flower Power's farm-like setting. Reneaud keeps horses, chickens and other animals — who provide more than just eggs and atmosphere.

Reneaud composts her horse manure, lets it set for three to four months until it breaks down to a rich, dark humus, then uses it to fertilize her plants. Flower Power customers are lucky enough to be able to take some home with them — free of charge — when it's available. The benefits of Reneaud's natural methods of fertilization are directly evident to

her customers.

"One thing people always notice when they're walking around the gardens is how big my hostas are," she said. "But if you look around, you'll see I have my chickens roaming free all over them. You get the great chicken manure fertilizer and the birds help keep the slugs under control too."

This integrative approach to enriching her soil and in turn, her plants, carries over into every aspect of her business.

"I try to keep pesticides to an absolute minimum," she said. "The only time I ever use any chemicals at all are in my potted perennials and hanging baskets. Otherwise, I only use manure. Anything that goes directly into the ground is going to be natural."

Barb encourages others to do the same, but understands that not everyone is blessed with the rich, healthy soil she enjoys at Flower Power.

"If people have very sandy, nutrient-deprived soil and if they're in an area where there isn't any run-off, then I'd send them to a lawn and garden store to explore some other options," she said.

"Otherwise, go natural first."

Controlling garden pests nature's way

BY EMILY GREEN
Los Angeles Times

The problem with pesticides is not just the health risk we face from exposure to chemicals, but that they mask the way plants actually grow.

If you use them in your garden, you will have to keep using them, because the natural systems, good soil, smart conditions and predators of pests will have been driven out.

Since taking over the Arboretum of Los Angeles County in 2001, superintendent Timothy Phillips has slashed chemical use by 80 percent and replaced it with more natural horticultural practice. Homeowners with less than 127 acres to manage needn't use chemicals at all, he thinks.

One exception: He'll allow that sometimes the only weapon against a runaway plant, say bamboo, is Roundup, the most benign of the weedkillers.

Here are tips from him and his garden's botanical information consultant, Frank McDonough, about nonchemical garden practice:

Plant choice: Buy robust plants. Hostas attract snails; certain types of roses are predisposed to mildew. Avoid runaway plants.

If a hackberry tree keeps coming back from a root or bamboo takes over, you may need to treat it with a weed-killer containing glyphosate, such as Roundup.

Don't just saturate it, warns Phillips, a specialist on how to remove it safely and with the least amount of chemical. This may involve cutting it down, treating the stump, cutting again. Beware of using glyphosate formulations near water: Many kill tad-

poles and other amphibians.

Plant diversely: To prevent buildup of whitefly and spider mites on vulnerable specimens, avoid monoculturing, where the landscape is dominated by one kind of plant.

Roses and hibiscuses are best grown in or near mixed beds where grasses, salvias, lavender and wildflowers create reserves for beneficial insects and birds. If buildup starts, spray affected foliage with a hose repeatedly every day for a week.

Create zones: Mixing water-loving plants, such as impatiens, with woody, drought-tolerant specimens, such as rosemary, is a recipe for root rot. No fungicide will cure it. Group plants that need similar treatment for healthiest results.

Improve soil and check pH: Soil condition dictates the availability of nutrients. For annuals and kitchen gardens, plant nitrogen-fixing cover crops such as clover and peas in the winter.

Water shrubs and trees with soakers or irrigation lines. Do not water beds with sprinklers, but keep water around root balls, so as not to promote weeds and pockets of water where mosquitoes can breed.

Avoid insecticides: Even the mildest ones do not differentiate between beneficial bugs and pests. Without the beneficial bugs, the pests will have no predators, and often an infestation only worsens as they become resistant to the insecticide.

Mulch: A 3-inch mulch base will prevent weeds,

preserve moisture and break down into a soil conditioner. Most trees should not require fertilizer. Keep mulch from contact with trunks to avoid crown rot.

Avoid chemical fertilizers: These encourage weak, watery foliage that attract sucking insects, whereas slower, stouter growth is better equipped to resist predation. Instead, use manure and fish or meat and bone meal. Dilute the meal so dogs and critters don't dig it up.

Aerate plants: Fungus and mildew can usually be cured by strategic pruning to aerate dampness. Check if the plant is getting enough sunlight. Try spraying with water before morning sun hits it. If the problem persists, remove the plant.

Snails: Keep a clean garden. Avoid plants that attract them such as hostas. Eat or clear old sorrel and leafy refuges. Plant lilies and irises away from susceptible plants such as Meyer lemons. Finally, learn to live with them until a predator arrives. No poison will strip a garden of

snails more efficiently than lizards or possums.

Restrict pruning to the autumn and winter to promote nesting pest-gleaning birds such as bushtits from February through June.

Lawns act as verges between houses and storm drains, so avoid chemical fertilizers, pesticides and weedkillers that will wash into the ocean. Try leaving mown grass to dry and break down on the lawn, so it acts as a soil conditioner, or use clippings to start your own compost pile for fallen leaves and kitchen cuttings. Put all weeds through composting, or in green bins for city composting, to kill seeds and avoid pathogen build up.

Pesticide profiles: To look up active ingredients in pesticides, go to a site run by a collection of land-grant universities, including the University of California, Davis: <http://extoxnet.orst.edu/index.html>.

For health questions, call the Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control at (888) 422-8737 or go to www.atsdr.cdc.gov.

FUN

Planning perfect outdoor parties

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you can think of, including cars, fish and palm trees.) Or how about a flashing disco ball for a '70s or '80s dance party?

And what would an outdoor party be without food? A menu will need to be planned well ahead of the party. For example, if a full meal is selected, where will you serve your guests? How about a self-serve buffet?

Remember the little things, such as condiments and serving utensils. Most outdoor parties begin in the afternoon, so have plenty of ice and keep foods covered.

When it comes to pulling off a successful party, Martel recommends bringing in reinforcements.

"Have others do some of the work for you. That way, you will be free to mingle with your guests," she said.

This can also be accomplished by hiring caterers, preparing dishes ahead of time and refrigerating, or having guests bring a dish to pass.

When it comes to the "Big Event," a contingency plan will ensure stress and conflict don't color the outdoor party.

"I always have a 'Plan B,'" said Martel. "The day can start sunny then turn to rain. Have a backup plan in place,



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