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MANAGING 'PESTS' AND DISEASES

You are doing all you can to provide a healthy, diverse garden habitat for a wide range of creatures, and feeding your soil with great compost, but some plants still look sick, and there are still bugs eating your crops! Nowadays you can buy a range of 'natural' sprays to address these issues, but you can also try making some yourself...

There is very little scientific proof that 'homemade' sprays actually work, but you can still try using them to manage pests in your organic home garden. Be aware that any spray that can harm 'bad' creatures like aphids or white butterfly caterpillars can also harm 'good' creatures like bees and red admiral butterfly caterpillars. Spraying in the evening is the best option, as bees and butterflies won't be out and about.

You should always practice safe use of pesticides, 'natural' or not - wear personal protective equipment.

Bug juice (generally safe)

Collect about half a cup of the offending insects. Place them in a blender (not one that you use for food!) with 2 cups of water and whizz until homogenised, then strain it. Use all of it right away, as it will not keep. Do not use this method on pests that may harbour human disease, such as houseflies, mosquitoes, fleas or ticks.

Soapy water (generally safe)

May be effective against aphids. Can be repeated as many times as you like. After spraying the affected plants, hose them down gently with clear water. Dissolve 225g of plain soap (not detergent) in 9 litres of hot water. Stir well to make sure all the soap has dissolved. Cool before use. This needs to be sprayed directly on the insect.

Seaweed (generally safe)

May be effective against mildew and can act as a plant feed too. Spray as a precaution whenever you think plants might be in danger, such as growing very close together or when the weather is humid. Either leave the seaweed to soak in water for a fortnight or boil it up well covered with water until the liquid begins to thicken. In either case, dilute it until the colour of weak tea before using it.

Chamomile (generally safe)

May be useful against mildew, fruit rot, rust and fungal diseases generally. Use at the first sign of trouble. Use fresh flowers, dried flowers or tea bags. Cover with water, bring to the boil and hold it there for a minute or two before removing from the heat. Leave to cool, then strain and dilute with four times the amount of water.

Stinging nettles (*generally safe*)

May repel aphids, and may reduce mildew. A good foliar feeding spray and liquid manure. Cut the tops off nettles and leave the roots to grow on. Cover stems and leaves in water and bring to the boil. Hold for about about 10 minutes. Cool and strain. Dilute to the colour of weak tea before use. The sludge can be tipped on the compost heap.

Onion (*generally safe*)

May be effective against red spider mites. Cut up onions, skins and all, and leave covered with boiling water. Use well diluted. Instead, for a spray with more oomph, put the onions through the blender, add a garlic clove and a couple of chilli peppers, cover the mush with water, strain and dilute.

Chives

(generally

safe)

May be useful for fungal problems on roses or cucurbits (squashes, courgettes, cucumbers). Spray regularly to prevent fungal problems developing. Pour 50ml of boiling water over a handful of fresh chives or 1 Tbsp of dried chives. Leave for an hour, then strain and store in a jar or bottle until needed. Use one part of chive liquid to two parts of water.

Garlic (*generally safe*)

May be effective against aphids, white butterfly, beanfly, leaf curl, brown rot, ants, spiders and caterpillars, but also can kill some useful predators, so only use for severe infestations. Crush 4 cloves of garlic and soak them overnight barely covered in vegetable oil. Strain and add to a litre of soapy water. Stir well. Strain again into a non-metallic container and store till needed. To use, dilute 1 part of this mixture to 20 parts of water.

Feverfew (*pyrethrum*) (*Toxic to humans*)

A general insecticide. Use in the evenings after bees have gone to bed as you don't want to hurt them. Keep it away from ponds and streams to avoid killing aquatic creatures. Don't make too much at a time and use every other day or so as its effect is short-lived, particularly when the sun is out. Use the dried flowers of feverfew. Pour boiling water over them and leave to steep until cold. Do not boil them, as the fumes could make you ill. Add a little soapy water. The spray should be pale in colour.

Elder leaf (*Toxic to humans*)

A general insecticide and fungicide. Cover a quantity of leaves with water and bring to the boil. Simmer for 20 minutes. Don't inhale the steam. Cool, strain and dilute until the colour is pale yellow before using.

Rhubarb leaf (*Toxic to humans*)

May help control aphids, thrips, whitefly and other pests. Best sprayed towards evening once bees have gone to sleep as contact with the spray may harm them, but it will soon break down. Only hose it off if there are a lot of dead insects you want to clean up. Rhubarb leaves are poisonous to people - don't inhale the steam during preparation, only make enough spray to use in one go and never store it. Chop up the leaves, cover with water and boil up. Keep on a slow boil for about half an hour. Cool, strain and add the liquid to at least an equal amount of soapy water before use.