

Bug Out

By Gloria Jean

Many homeowners use too much pesticide and fertilizer that can end up in our lakes, beaches, and bays when it rains or when they over-water. They also turn to sprays or other toxic pesticides, either store bought or professionally applied, whenever they spot a few insects within the home. Now there's a new way to deal with destructive or problematic pests in the home and garden in a manner that causes the least possible harm to people and to the environment. It is called **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**.

IPM is used in many schools, hospitals and homes around the US. It is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common-sense practices involving the use of the full spectrum of control measures in a coordinated, integrated and foresighted manner. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methodologies, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property and the environment.

IPM takes advantage of all appropriate pest management options including, but not limited to, the judicious use of pesticides. (Organic food production applies many of the same concepts as IPM but limits the use of pesticides to those that are produced from natural sources as opposed to synthetic chemicals.)

Why practice IPM when chemical pesticides so often succeed at controlling pests?

Here are some compelling reasons for having a broader approach to pest management than just the use of chemicals:

- **Keep a Balanced Ecosystem.**
Every ecosystem, made up of living things and their non-living environment, has a balance; the actions of one creature in the ecosystem usually affect other, different organisms. The introduction of chemicals into the ecosystem can change this balance, destroying certain species and allowing other species (sometimes the pests themselves) to dominate. Beneficial insects can be killed by pesticides, leaving few natural mechanisms of pest control.
- **Pesticides Can Be Ineffective.**

Pests can become resistant to pesticides. Furthermore, pests may survive in some situations where the chemical does not reach pests, is washed off, is applied at an improper rate, or is applied at an improper life stage of the pest.

- **IPM is Not Difficult.**

Believe it or not, you will have done much of the “work” for an IPM approach if you’ve figured out the problem (the pest), determined the extent of the damage, and decided on the action to take.

- **Save Money.**

IPM can save money through avoiding home and garden damage due to pests and avoiding unnecessary pesticide expense.

- **Promote a Healthy Environment.**

We have much to learn about the persistence of chemicals in the environment, and their effect on living creatures. However, more cases of contaminated ground water appear each year, and disposal of containers and unused pesticides still poses a challenge.

IPM Strategies for Safe HOME Pest Control

Preferred IPM methods for the home include:

1. During housing construction, keep a 12-inch barrier of smooth concrete, sand or other material between the soil surface and substructure wood beneath a building. Consider having all lumber pretreated with sodium borate which repels boring insects and also acts as a fire retardant.
2. Seal cracks with paint, caulk, steel wool and weather-stripping; patch holes in window screens.
3. Choose termite-resistant wood for fences or other structures that must contact soil.
4. Remove woodpiles, untreated fence posts, and buried scrap wood near structures.
5. Provide adequate ventilation to substructures and keep them dry.
6. Immediately repair foundation cracks.
7. Keep trees and shrubs trimmed. Termites and other pests will often use overgrown trees to gain access to your house through your roof.
8. Get rid of clutter – Clean thoroughly.
9. Vacuum up pests and their eggs – place vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag before putting in garbage.
10. Clean and pest-proof garbage storage.
11. When you recycle, rinse cans and bottles before storing. Do not store for long periods.
12. Store food properly – Use jars with rubber seals or plastic containers with snap-on lids.

13. Freeze flour, rice and cereal for four days to kill moth or beetle larvae.
14. Put pet dishes in a moat of water or cover them tightly when your pet is done eating.
15. Trap pests.
16. When chemicals are needed, use baits rather than sprays when possible, and make sure they cannot be accessed by children or pets.

Termites

Termites are among the pests most feared by homeowners because of the damage they can cause to wooden structures. However, swarms of flying termites do not always mean your building is infested. Nor does the absence of visible signs of infestation mean that your home is termite free. If you suspect that your home is infested, consult a professional. Do-it-yourself sprays cannot be relied on to eliminate infestation. There are different types of termites in California, and management of each termite species is different.

If you expect non-toxic, or the least toxic, approach to pest management, it is especially important to be an informed customer when choosing the appropriate termite and pest management company. Ask questions that will determine whether they use IPM approaches that are designed to better target the core of the infestation and reduce pesticide use on your property.

- Are they licensed by the CA Structural Pest Control Board? (You can check the Board's website for more information, www.wdopestboard.ca.gov)
- What is the extent of the training they have had in the correct application of the method(s) they will use?
- Do they conduct a thorough inspection of the property before determining what service is appropriate and prescribe the best treatment for the specific situation rather than treating more than is necessary? (A thorough inspection will take about 1 ½ - 2 hrs.)
- Do they educate the consumer on do-it-yourself maintenance that can help prevent future occurrences?
- Do they offer technologies such as heat, electro-gun, microwave, and botanicals (orange oil) that can successfully suppress infestations without the use of chemicals?
- If chemicals are needed, do they offer low-toxicity treatments such as borates, foam and precision injection?

When you are satisfied with the answers you receive, take 2 more steps: carefully read the company's warrantee, and get a second opinion.

If you are in need of termite remediation, you may begin your search, and your education, with 3 of the San Diego Natural Guide's advertisers:

ECOLA offers non-toxic technologies such as heat, electro-gun, microwave and botanicals in addition to low-toxicity treatments such as borates, foam and precision injection. Owner Susan Fries, known as the Termite Lady, says her company was green "before green was anything more than a color."

www.ecolatermite.com

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