

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener  
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IPM is an abbreviation for Integrated Pest Management. This means combining a variety of approaches to pest control, in order to decrease plant damage, as opposed to just using pesticides, when damage is observed. Some suggestions for implementation of IPM follow, starting with those having the least environmental impact.

Start by selecting healthy plants that are disease-resistant and are recommended for use in the Pacific Northwest. Create a healthy soil environment by ensuring proper soil pH. Incorporating composted organic matter into the soil before planting will improve soil structure. Care for your plants by watering thoroughly when planting and during dry periods.

To combat mildew and fungal diseases, allow for good air circulation, using proper pruning techniques. Plant sanitation is also important. Rake up fallen leaves that may be diseased, and prune out diseased branches and twigs. Manually remove pests and over-wintering eggs, when possible. Even potentially harmful organisms may exist at tolerable levels. Look for specific pests, as most insects aren't harmful. Beneficial insects such as lady beetles and wasps can control many pests.

When using pest control materials, use the safest materials first. B.t. (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) can control caterpillars, if applied properly. Pyrethrum, a derivative of chrysanthemums, is also available, and has less impact on the environment than many pesticides. However, you should only use this when needed, as it will also kill beneficial insects. Insecticidal soap is also effective on soft-bodied insects such as aphids.

Fertilize your plants only when necessary, and at the proper time of year. Compost may also help supply necessary plant nutrients. Use chemical controls only when necessary, and be sure to follow label instructions carefully. This should help give some idea of the many different ways you can help reduce levels of disease and insect damage in your home garden.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.