

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener  
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Mainly organic pest control means a completely different way of thinking. It is no longer true that ‘the only good bug is a dead bug’. Instead, you must realize that most insects are, in fact, beneficial to your garden. Organic gardeners tend to be more tolerant of a bite or hole in their produce, because they avoid using synthetic pesticides for pest control.

There are many ways to prevent unwanted pests in your garden. Keep your soil in good condition. Add compost every year. Adjust your soil’s pH if needed.

Plant good healthy plants. You can get many plants that are disease and pest resistant. Take good care of them. Feed and water regularly. Clean up diseased plant material.

Walk through your garden and look around. Look under leaves and plants. Pick out slugs and get rid of them. You may want to try a floating row cover. They let in rain, sun and air, but keep out invading insects such as the dreaded white cabbage moth that lays eggs on your cabbage. Sticky yellow squares or rectangles work well in your greenhouse or tunnel to trap whiteflies. Sticky white traps suspended over the tops of infected plants works for flea beetles. Replace traps when they are full.

The organic gardener can use a Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), which is a naturally occurring bacterium. This product kills caterpillars when they consume it. Insecticidal soap kills pests by dissolving their protective coating, and horticultural oil kills other pests by clogging their breathing pores.

Organic pest control takes a bit more time and planning in your garden, but in the end it is worth the effort because you are helping to make a cleaner and healthier environment for everyone. For more information on this subject, refer to EB0648 “Organic Gardening”, which is available at your local WSU Extension office or as a FREE download from <http://pubs.wsu.edu/>.

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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.