



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707) 833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – April 2011 Your Russian River Watershed Garden

It is spring time and many of us have begun working on our yards and gardens. We want them to look great and produce perfect vegetables. So we take what we might think is the easy way and use chemicals to get rid of bugs and make it green. But wait, it's time to stop and think.

April 22 is Earth Day. We all have heard that everything in nature is connected to everything else. That means the chemicals used to fertilize plants or deal with pests like ants, aphids, snails and weeds don't stay where sprayed. They end up all over your yard; your neighbor's yard, and in local creeks, spread by wind and water. Only about 0.1% of insects are actually pests - most are neutral or beneficial (pollinators, food, or predators of pests). But insecticides harm a broad range of insects, other wildlife, pets, and plants from your yard to the Russian River.

Fortunately there are many ways to manage pest using non-toxic and less toxic methods and have a vital and productive garden. As with any problem, prevention is the best cure. For example:

- To prevent mosquito problems, eliminate standing water in buckets, barrels and other containers and change bird bath water frequently.
- Use barriers to keep snails away from planters, and sticky barriers to keep ants off trees or shrubs.
- Locate the right plant in the right place, with proper conditions of sunlight, water and space.
- Develop healthy soil by adding organic matter like compost.
- Always have a good layer of mulch on bare soil areas and around plants to prevent weeds, add nutrients, control erosion and retain soil moisture. Organic mulches include bark, wood chips, compost and nut hulls.
- Keep the garden clean by removing non-organic debris, weeds and infected plants.
- Plant a variety of species to attract beneficial insects.
- Walk your garden often noticing every plant so you can prevent problems without chemicals.

Where prevention and barriers are not enough, less toxic options to synthetic chemical pesticides can be used. Insecticidal soaps, oils, and bait traps are less harmful to our waterways and wildlife than synthetic chemical sprays. Ask at your local nursery for help finding these less toxic products. If, as a last resort, you do need to use pesticides, use only the minimum amount necessary over the smallest area. Read the instructions to be sure to use the most safe and effective method of application.

Not using chemicals is best if your goal is to attract birds, wildlife, and beneficial insects to your yard. The gardener will need patience as it can take up to a year for your garden to establish a successful "bug balance" as you migrate to an Earth-friendly garden.

Celebrate Earth Day 2011 by transitioning to natural gardening and pest control. You can dispose of unwanted pesticides at your local Household Hazardous Waste drop-off site. Don't pour them down the drain; our wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove most pesticides from wastewater. In Sonoma County take unwanted pesticides and other household toxic wastes to the landfill at 500 Mecham Rd., Petaluma. Call the Eco-Desk at (707) 565-3375 or visit the web site at www.recyclenow.org for more information. In Mendocino County call the Recycling Hotline at (707) 468-9704 for information regarding household hazardous waste collection sites or visit their website at www.mendorecycle.org/haz.html.

For online information about less toxic pest management, go to the UC Davis Integrated Pest Management website at: www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/index.html or visit: www.ourwaterourworld.org for fact sheets, locations to buy less toxic



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707) 833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

products, and other resources. Another good source of fact sheets is the Seattle Green Gardening program at <http://www.seattle.gov/util/proipm/>

For help dealing with your specific pest problem, call the Sonoma County master gardener program at (707) 565-2608 Monday-Friday. In Mendocino County, call the University of California Cooperative Extension office in Ukiah at (707) 463-4495.

This article was authored by Forest Frasier of the City of Santa Rosa Stormwater Program on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.