Managing Landscape Pests Responsibly
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Controlling pests such as weeds, diseases or insects in the landscape can be quite a task. Once a homeowner notices a pest problem, their first inclination is to go to their local garden center or nursery and purchase chemicals to control or kill the pest. These chemicals can be harmful to humans, animals and especially the environment. The best approach to safely managing pests in the landscape is by using an Integrated Pest Management program or IPM. IPM is a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical and chemical tools in a way that minimizes health and environmental risks.

Basic principles of IPM are:

- Plant pest-free or pest-resistant plants to prevent future problems. Avoid purchasing plants that show signs of any pest activity.
- Choose the right plant for the right area. Plants suited to their appropriate area will generally be healthier and more pest resistant.
- Monitor and scout your landscape frequently to detect any early pest problems. Check under the leaves and on stems for any insect activity. Use a small hand lens to detect smaller pests. To detect certain pests such as spider mites or chili thrips, take the infested flower or leaf and shake it over a white blank sheet of paper. Look for small specks scurrying across the paper.
- If pest control is necessary, handpick pests off the plant. Pruning off infested areas can also be very effective in reducing pest populations. Use a high pressure stream of water to knock off pest insects on the plant. Remove diseased leaves that have fallen to the ground to prevent spores from going back up on the plant.
- Spot-treat infected areas. Avoid using blanket applications of insecticides and herbicides. Blanket applications can kill beneficial insects in your landscape. Herbicides applied near water-bodies can be detrimental to aquatic organisms and can pollute our water supply.
- Use environmentally friendly pesticides. Insecticides such as insecticidal soaps and dormant oils are extremely effective against scale, mealy bugs, aphids and other pest insects.
- If you notice a pest outbreak, determine if a problem really exists or if natural enemies, such as ladybugs, are working on your behalf. Let nature do the work. Learn how to identify beneficial insects such as lacewing larvae, big-eyed bugs and mealy bug destroyer in your landscape.
- Water on an as-needed basis. Over-watering increases thatch and creates a shorter and weaker root system in turf grass and landscape plants. Over-watering can also encourage excessive weed growth such as nutsedge and dollarweed.
- Avoid over-head irrigation on ornamentals to reduce fungal leaf diseases.
- Use a slow or controlled release fertilizer. Frequent amounts of quick release fertilizer increases new shoot growth, which can attract certain pest insects such as chinch bugs and aphids.
- **ALWAYS** read pesticide labels and follow the directions completely; it is the law.

**Additional Resources:**

**Websites**
- UF IFAS Sumter County Extension [http://www.sumter.ifas.ufl.edu](http://www.sumter.ifas.ufl.edu)
- Solutions for Your Life [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu)

**Fact Sheets**
- Natural Products for Insect Pest Management [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN197](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN197)
- Turfgrass Insects Sheet 1 [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN025](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN025)
- Beneficial Insects and Mites [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN078](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN078)
- Natural Enemies and Biological Control [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN120](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN120)