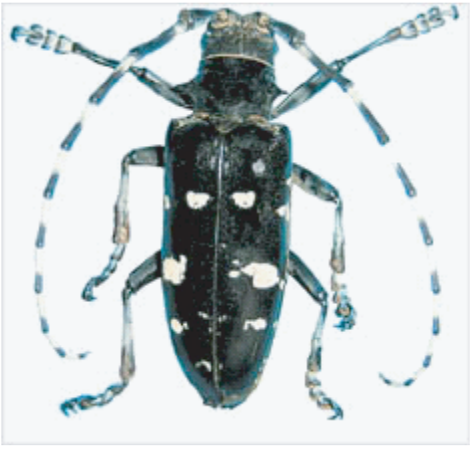
The Small, The Bad And The Ugly

New Products Offer Defense Against Garden Pests



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First, the bad news. Remember sitting at the lunch table in third grade and discussing why God made worms (Yuck) or snakes (Oh, gross!) or mosquitoes? (Eeee.) Well, gardeners do the same thing. They sit around wondering why we have to have woolly adelgids or gypsy-moth caterpillars. Many of our worst garden plagues come from somewhere else. Woolly adelgids came from Long Island, courtesy of Hurricane Gloria, by way of the Pacific Northwest, by way of Japan. Woolly adelgids destroy hemlocks. Gypsy-moth caterpillars were imported from Europe in order to evaluate them for silk production. However, in 1869, some were blown off an open windowsill in Medford, Mass., and they now consume 500 different kinds of plants in the United States. As if that isn't bad enough, the latest, possibly greatest pest, the Asian longhorned beetle destroys just about any kind of deciduous tree you can think of, except for oaks. The Asian longhorned beetle arrived in the U.S. in 1996 in wooden packing crates from China. They are now in New York, New Jersey, Illinois and Ontario. The female beetle lays 160 eggs in the bark of the tree. The larvae tunnel underneath the bark, destroying the xylem and phloem. Having wrecked the tree's circulation system, they then tunnel into the wood where they pupate. Then they tunnel back out to the bark, eat a round exit hole in the tree and emerge to start the whole process over again. Holes and sawdust are a sign that the Asian longhorned beetle not only has destroyed your tree, but that new ones have gotten loose. The cure seems almost worse than the problem. When a beetle or infested tree is spotted, a large area of trees around it is quarantined and all the susceptible trees are cut down, chipped, and burned. Surrounding trees beyond this area are treated with a preventative insecticide for three years. So far, 10 thousand trees have been cut down in order to stop the Asian longhorned beetles' spread. This approach seems to be working, along with a regulation that all wooden packing material from abroad must be heat-treated or fumigated. If you see signs of beetle damage on a tree, or if you see the beetles, (photo above), call the State Entomologist (203-974-8474). If possible, catch the beetle and put it in a jar of rubbing alcohol for identification. Now for some good news. Last season, Bayer released a new product consisting of a systemic fertilizer, fungicide and insecticide called Bayer's All In One Rose & Flower Care Concentrate. You mix with water and pour it around susceptible plants. My husband tested All In One fairly late last season on some rose bushes and phlox that were diseased and infested with various sucking insects. The plants put out new foliage and rebloomed beautifully. The really ratty phlox that we were going to get rid of dropped its diseased leaves, grew healthy ones and kept on blooming right up until frost. It's a nuisance to mix up the potion if you have a lot of plants and then to reapply it every six weeks, but if you want to grow insect-and disease-prone plants (bee balm, roses, garden phlox, zinnias, etc.) that are beautiful and healthy, Bayer's All In One works great.

Last summer, I tested a new organic product called Messenger from Eden Bioscience. Messenger is a powder in a pre-measured packet that you mix with water and spray on the foliage of disease-prone plants, such as lilacs, phlox, roses, bee balm, tomatoes, strawberries and grapes. Messenger is a protein that makes the plant think it is under attack from a disease. This activates its autoimmune response to protect against disease and to stimulate growth. The plants that I sprayed were diseased, but the new growth was clean, and the leaves and flowers of the roses grew bigger. Eden Bioscience laboratory suggests mixing Messenger with a water soluble fertilizer for even better results. Messenger should be applied as soon as the plant starts into growth and every two to three weeks afterwards, but I applied it once, late in the season, and the results were still amazing. This season I plan to do side-by-side tests on plants in my cutting garden to see which product produces the best results. The good news is that both work wonderfully and are available at garden centers and home stores.