

a little to see if it's tasty), and then move along without bothering other plants in the area.

Growing garlic around plants that are susceptible to insect infestations or damage from rooting and digging critters will often prevent the problem from recurring. If you plant garlic close to roses, you should not be troubled by aphids on those pretty bushes. Lizz, who works with me in my gardens, often plants garlic or onion sets to protect nearby vegetables from browsing deer. It has worked very well for us, and we have a huge herd of deer that passes through the food garden multiple times a day. She takes this approach in her home garden, too, with equal success.

Growing sharp-tasting plants intermixed with the juicy, tasty ones seems to confuse animals. Wild animals tend to leave my chili peppers and sage alone. I plant hot chili peppers among succulent spinach and lettuces. I occasionally find a hot pepper plucked off a plant with one bite out of it and then dropped on the ground, but this doesn't happen very often. This has worked for deer, raccoons, and squirrels. The animals don't come back and try eating them again.

Hose Them Off!

Each summer we're faced with an outbreak of pear slugs on our fruit trees. This tends to happen around midsummer. Pear slugs have a short life, and once they're gone we are not further bothered by them, though in other areas they pop up again in September. They're a good food supply for birds, so typically we leave the task of managing the problem in their care. However, the slugs can drain energy from the fruiting process of a tree, so if they're causing serious defoliation, we step in and take action.

Rather than applying a pesticide, we use a pressure nozzle on the end of the garden hose. A hard spray of water will rinse the slugs off a tree. Once they've been washed off, the slugs die. This is an easy and fast solution. It works nicely with no ill effects on songbirds or pollinators.

You can try the same trick with an aphid infestation. If you're trying to dislodge aphids from vegetable plants rather than fruit trees, you'll need to use less pressure from the hose. You may have to repeat the procedure a couple of times in a week or so to achieve control.

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Give Them a Hand

Handpicking squash bugs, beetles, slugs, or caterpillars from vegetables and fruits is quite effective. My adult daughter is squeamish about handling these critters, but we found a solution: she wears a pair of garden gloves.

As you pluck the pests off tomato leaves or snatch them from the base of summer squash plants, you can toss them into a canning jar filled with soapy water. Just mix a squirt of liquid dish soap in a quart jar of water, and it's a deadly bug bath. If it's slugs or caterpillars I'm gathering off the plants, I usually just toss them out into the dirt driveway and within moments birds will swoop down and snap them up, happy to have my help for their lunch. In fact, if the thrashers notice what I'm up to, they'll follow me around the garden to snatch up any caterpillar I toss their way.

Repellents: Smelly Stuff and Hot Stuff

Short of a physical barrier, the best way we've found for discouraging persistent problematic wildlife is some type of repelling agent. We use many that we make ourselves, and we purchase others that we've found to be effective. I classify repellents into two groups: those that taste or smell disagreeable or otherwise irritate, and those that give a false message to the targeted wild animal that a predator or dead animal is nearby.

No matter what type of repellent you choose, keep in mind that most will have to be refreshed regularly, at the very least following any rainstorm. Others can last for up to six months and still maintain their effectiveness despite the rain. Some commercial products that would normally be odiferous to our human noses are deodorized but still maintain their ability to repel wild or domestic animals, whose sense of smell is much more sensitive than ours. Because most birds have no sense of smell, and since they often tolerate eating very spicy plants, repellents typically do not work well for birds.

In especially challenging circumstances, we've learned to combine repellents with other tools to increase our chances of success. Also, sometimes a repellent will work for a long time and then for some reason unknown to me, the animals I'm trying to discourage will just ignore it. Maybe they just get used to it. In any case, be prepared to change what you're using if you find that repellent no longer works the way you need it to. Sometimes a fresh approach will do the job.

Garlic

Garlic is always a good choice. In just about any form, garlic will repel all sorts of wild creatures from garden plants. Almost every creature (besides humans) dislikes the smell and taste. You should be prepared for the entire area to smell like a freshly made batch of garlic bread if you use this repellent. You can make it in any number of ways. Garlic water (page 101) is simple to prepare and works very well, but it does takes an hour or so to concoct. Spreading dehydrated garlic granules on the ground around the plants you want to protect is fast and won't make the area smell as much, but it's more expensive.

Commercial products based on garlic oil can be sprayed on or near plants to repel wildlife. If you don't want to have garlic flavor on your veggies and fruits, spray other plants growing in the same area instead of using garlic oil directly on food plants.

Hot Pepper

Often I am asked what might work to keep squirrels and chipmunks from digging around in the garden beds. Or I'm asked how to keep out pesky neighborhood cats intent on scratching up the soil or, even worse, using it for a litter box. My answer? Try hot chili peppers!

Capsaicin is the chemical compound in peppers (of the genus *Capsicum*) that makes them hot and spicy. A squirrel, chipmunk, or cat digging in soil where hot peppers have been applied will get this compound on their skin and feet. If they don't feel it on their fur, they'll get it on their tongue when they clean themselves. It doesn't take long before they put two and two together and realize that at least this part of the garden is no place to mess with.

Animals dislike the burning sensation a hot pepper causes on the skin or in the nose and eyes. Humans do, too: wear gloves while handling hot peppers, and *don't rub your eyes*.

I prefer to use crushed chili peppers because they're easy to get and not very expensive. Any variety of hot chili pepper will work fine, but the hotter it is, the better and faster it will work. Choose something like crushed pequin (bird) or habanero peppers. You can find them in the grocery (ethnic or spice aisles), or you can mailorder in bulk from herb or gourmet cooking businesses. You can purchase capsicum-based garden products; some are designed for use against insects, and stronger formulations are for keeping away animals. If you use a commercial hot-pepper spray, follow the label directions for proper application. You'll need to reapply crushed or powdered peppers if they blow away or are washed off by rain; commercial sprays will eventually wash off as well.

I sprinkle the crushed chili peppers on the ground where the critters are digging. This repellent has kept squirrels from digging good-sized holes in my planter boxes in their efforts to bury nuts for winter storage. I don't mind them burying nuts, but sometimes they disturb fragile plants in the process. This has happened to the salad greens, and those plants had a hard time recovering.

Ground black pepper works almost as well as hot chili peppers, probably for the same reason. As the garden season progresses and the squash, pumpkins, and cucumbers are growing well, that's about the time when squash bugs show up in large numbers. One of our remedies for potato beetles and squash bugs is to sprinkle ground black pepper around at the base of the squash and pumpkin plants. It works well on cucumbers, melons, and gourds, too. Many types of insects, as well as wild animals, don't like being around the smell or taste of black pepper. It seems also to repel raccoons, skunks, squirrels, and rabbits. Doug, who helps us on the farm, buys giant-sized jugs of ground black pepper at the dollar store and uses it to keep squash bugs out of his vegetables.

Cinnamon and Wood Ashes

Powdered cinnamon is a great repellent for any soft-bodied insect pests that are causing trouble for fruits and vegetables. The natural oil in the cinnamon burns the body of an insect it comes in contact with, so pests just avoid it. Long ago my grandmother told me to apply a single thin line of powdered cinnamon along the baseboard and in front of the threshold to prevent sugar ants from getting in the kitchen and into my pantry goods. It works in the garden and the greenhouses, too!

Sprinkle cinnamon around lettuce plants to prevent ants from farming aphids on the leaves, or to keep them from eating strawberries. The key is to have an unbroken line of the powder surrounding the area you want to protect. If there's a break in the line, ants will find the spot and pass through it on their merry way.

Wood ashes can be used in a similar fashion. Sprinkle them on the ground around the base of plants that are being eaten by snails and slugs. I use wood ashes around my strawberry plants when they are fruiting heavily. This remedy works well, though you need to refresh the barrier of ashes after a heavy rain. It's best as a temporary remedy; too much wood ash can raise the soil pH enough to affect how well plants grow.

Mint

Mint (especially peppermint and spearmint) is an excellent repellent for many kinds of rodents. Mice, rats, voles, and moles have no tolerance for the smell and leave the area undisturbed. Mice and other small rodents like to eat root crops, and their digging and tunneling will damage plants. This can be a frequent problem where mulch has been left in the garden after the growing season; they find it a warm home during cold months, with a ready food supply of roots nearby. It also happens in growing structures like cold frames.