

News Column

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By: Jeff Banks, Retired Ag Agent

Holy Petunias!

What's happening to your petunias? Shot with a shotgun? Hit by hail? Kids playing with a hole punch? No, it's that pesky tobacco budworm!

Tobacco budworm adult moths lay eggs on flower buds. The eggs hatch, and caterpillar larvae chew their way into the center of the flower bud, safely hidden away with plenty to eat. Sometimes you can see them, once they grow larger, inching along the leaves and looking for more food or a place to pupate.

A few of these pests are easily tolerated, but if your flowers start looking too tattered to tolerate, try using some B.t., a natural insecticide. This insecticide targets only moth and butterfly caterpillars, so it won't harm your beneficial insects. Picking off the caterpillars in the morning or late evening also helps control these pests.

Decorative Containers

Most of us think of potted plants as a transient population. We plant tender perennials and tropicals in containers so we can move them in and out as seasons change. But containers also allow us to add color accent where no soil exists, lift plants into reach, and raise scents closer to our noses. Containers fill gaps, add balance, soften angles, and divert attention from less attractive garden features. Containers may be tall and thin or short and wide, vibrantly colored or softly muted.

Some containers are very expensive, others not too bad. Most will last longer if protected during winter. Soften harsh, flat, industrial-looking scenes with a variety of container shapes, sizes and colors. On the side of concrete-slab building, whimsical trees and colorful flowers create an atmosphere of fun and adventure.

Newly planted gardens and landscapes often lack any variety in plant height, since all are young. Grow vertical accent plants in containers to give your eyes a break.

Small plants' textures and colors are better appreciated when they are brought closer to eye level. A wide bowl container, similar in height to a nearby sitting wall, showcases its plants.

Decorative pots are handy disguises for hoses, hand tools, or other garden equipment. Even while keeping the hose accessible, it stays neat and tidy in a clay pot.

USU's Integrated Pest Management Website

A new resource for home gardeners is the Woody Ornamentals IPM (Integrated Pest Management) Advisories. These are weekly updates that highlight upcoming concerns for home gardeners and the green industry on current insect and disease sightings and outbreak predictions. The advisory is intended to be as relevant and timely as possible. A new advisory is posted each week of the growing season. Utah State University Extension has great resources online including information on plant diseases, insects and their relatives, fact sheets, and pest advisories.

Go to <http://utahpests.usu.edu/> and click on the Integrated Pest Management icon, and select pest advisories on the left navigation bar to see the current Woody Ornamentals IPM Advisory.

Bee Kind to Pollinators

Pollination fun fact: A typical ear of corn has 750 to 1000 ovules (potential kernels) each producing a silk. When pollen lands on an individual silk, it quickly germinates and produces a pollen tube that grows the length of the silk to fertilize the ovule in 12 to 24 hours.

When we talk about reproduction we'll often use the term "the birds and the bees" but do we know what that really means? Pollination occurs when pollen grains are moved between two flowers of the same species, or within a single flower, by wind or animals that are pollinators. Successful pollination may require visits by multiple pollinators to a single flower that results in healthy fruit and fertile seeds, enabling plants to reproduce. If we didn't have pollinators visiting tomato blooms and many other fruit and vegetable plants in our garden, farms and orchards, we simply wouldn't have many crops!

About 75 % of all flowering plants rely on animal pollinators and over 200,000 species of animals act as pollinators. Of those, about 1,000 are hummingbirds, bats, and small mammals. The rest are insects such as beetles, bees, ants, wasps, butterflies, and moths.

"Pollinators are essential to our quality of life, and they may be in trouble," said Laurie Davies Adams, who directs the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC). "Many people don't realize that we depend on pollinators for 80% of the flowering plants in natural areas and for much of the food we eat. A world without pollinators is a world without strawberries, apples, almonds, berries, and even one-half of the oils in our diet."

For more information on pollinators: visit <http://www.pollinator.org>