

Teaching IPM Strategies to Home Gardeners Through Education of Nursery and Garden Center Employees

Integrated Pest Management Mini-Grant 2006

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For the majority of home gardeners, their introduction to weeds, pests, disease and products used to control them is at the local nursery or garden center. Traditionally, garden centers recommend appropriate chemicals to take care of problems. It's more convenient for them to sell a product than take time to explain the merits of integrating non-chemical options to reduce pest problems.

The idea of reducing pests rather than totally eliminating them is an innovative idea to most gardeners. Not only are pests killed when chemicals are used, but beneficial insects are eliminated as well. However, beneficial insects take a much greater time to become reestablished in the landscape. In addition to accepting a degree of damage from pests, the concept of integrated pest management also encourages reducing the amount of chemicals introduced into the environment.

Simple steps to help begin an integrated approach to pest management include:

- Proper pest identification and the pest's life cycle.
- Monitoring the landscape. Become familiar with existing plants, as well as the diseases and insects that are potential problems.
- Avoid using plants that have inherent problems. Take time to research plants before incorporating them into a landscape.
- Evaluate pest management strategies that have been used in the past.
- Decide what level of damage is acceptable for particular situations.
- Consider the options available, aside from the typical chemical application method, and then identify the windows of opportunity when these methods are best applied.

The objectives for this IPM project were to develop diagnostic and IPM training materials to be used by nursery and garden center employees; provide training for employees during the winter months; provide a diagnostic CD for businesses and develop fact sheets for distribution to garden centers and nurseries appropriate for the different growing seasons.

In addition to the proposed objectives a pre-assessment letter was sent to those who planned to attend the workshop and we collected an evaluation from those in attendance. From the pre-assessment we found that none of the attendees had a pesticide applicators license and only 3 business owners/managers had an associates' degree in horticulture while 6 had either no degree or an unrelated one. Of those in attendance one had taken the Master Gardener training and one knew what Integrated Pest Management meant. Only two of new or seasonal employees who helped customers were given some instruction on plant diagnostics and most were not familiar with pesticide labels, warnings or recommendations.

Following the plant pest diagnostic workshop over half of the participants felt they were better able to address customer questions, especially with the aid of the reference book provided. The majority of participants were confident in discussing alternative methods of pest control and all of them were willing to post or provide plant pest management information provided by USU Extension for customers, such as fact sheets and GardenUtah!

One of our objectives was to provide a CD with diagnostic aids, but the majority of participants felt it would be impractical for them to leave a customer, run to the computer, look up the problem and then return to the customer with the information. Usually the computer is located in an office which would be out of the way for the employees, while some businesses have a computer that is unavailable for employee use. Employees felt that the workbook that was compiled would be a better source of information than the CD.

One more objective included in the grant proposal was to make a presentation to a professional group about the project. The Western Region Agriculture Agents will meet this November giving me the opportunity to make a presentation. An abstract of the project was submitted and has been accepted for the meetings in Boise.