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JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

A question I often get asked is; "Why is habitat gardening important"? There are multiple reasons but one of them is that it saves the homeowner money.

Driving to work the other day I noticed a truck for an exterminator company. It made me realize that we have not had an exterminator at my home in at least 35 years as there is no need for one. We do not have insect problems inside the house since we have a functioning habitat in the landscape.

I have so many lizards (several species), toad frogs, birds, and even an occasional ribbon snake in my landscape that if a cockroach showed up, he would be committing suicide. His life span would be measured in seconds before he was dinner for some critter.

I did an experiment this past summer after a long dry spell. The soil-mulch layer had pulled away from the brick wall a little creating a small gap where insects like roaches or moths could hide. I turned on the garden hose and laid it up against the brick wall so it would flood the gap and drive any insects out.

In a couple minutes various insects from moths to earwigs began scurrying out. They did not travel more than a couple feet up the brick wall when several lizards appeared out of no-where and they rushed out and consumed them.

Occasionally, when the outside garage light is on, numerous toad frogs will line up and wait for the feast to begin. When a June bug or other insect appears, their life cycle ends in a couple seconds. After a toad has consumed 20-30 June bugs, they are so



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gorged they can't hop and can barely walk, so they slowly crawl back into the shrubbery to their homes and another one takes its place.

I have many fruit trees in my yard including a large Mulberry that occasionally gets bagworms. By the time I notice them, they are large bags with hundreds of caterpillars. All I have to do is tear a hole in the webbing or bag and wait. It is usually not long before wasps show up, grab a caterpillar and fly off with it. In short order they are almost gone (the wasps always leave 2 or 3 caterpillars behind).

During the winter months I occasionally get a few fungus gnats in my greenhouse. Before the population grows enough to be an issue, some beetle shows up and eats them all, preventing a problem. Similarly, I will get lots of yellowish aphids on my milkweeds. I just leave them alone; in a few days they are gone.

Several times in my life I have watched a Mocking Bird grab a small snake (or lizard) and fly over 100 feet up over a concrete driveway or street and then drop the snake. The birds will often do this several times till the snake is dead. Then they will take it into a tree where they will enjoy their lunch at their leisure.

The point of these stories is twofold. First, not having to pay 35 years' worth of exterminator fees has saved me many thousands of dollars. Secondly, it is very enjoyable to watch and study nature and see how God works. It always reminds me of these verses:

Job 12:7 (NIV) " But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you ; 8) or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you.



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Another study was published in the journal Science last fall, on the anti-cancer benefits of eating cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, kale, brussels sprouts, etc. They found a compound called indole-3-carbinol that suppressed growth of prostate tumors in animal studies. This chemical is also found in turnips. Previous research has shown that other chemicals in these same greens can interfere with the genes that promote cancer growth. Other studies have shown these greens are also effective in preventing breast cancer.

Crucifers and vegetables in general have higher levels of nutrients from dietary fiber to vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients than other foods. If they are grown organically on soils full of microbes and micro-nutrients (mineral rich soil), they are even more beneficial. Another reason to grow one's own food.

Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis have discovered that some bacteria species absorb electrons directly from the surrounding, liquid, soil or rock (In other words they eat electricity). This mechanism allows bacteria to survive in low nutrient conditions. Comment: I suspect that if enough electrons are removed from a rock or mineral particle, it would weaken the chemical bonds of the elements composing the rock molecules allowing them to decompose (weather) quicker. Journal mBio, Nov. 2019

One of our readers shared that she has had very good results on snail and slug control using a homeopathic remedy using *Helix tosta*. "Helix" is the Latin name for gastropods (snails) and "tosta" means toasted.

If anyone else has had experience with this remedy, please let us know. The information below was copied from this website for those whom want more information.

Make Your Own Snail Repellent Remedy

The following instructions will have you producing 100,000 liters of snail and slug repellent from just one small snail shell.

Instructions:

1. First, catch your snail.
2. Drop it quickly into a pot of boiling water to ensure a quick death then remove its body from its shell. If this is a little grisly for you, find an empty shell from one that has hopefully died of old age after a full life.
3. Clean the shell well, place it into an electric oven or kiln, and roast it at 850°C until the shell turns into a white powder.
4. Triturate (grind) this powder with lactose (sugar of milk) to a 3X potency, at which time it will easily dissolve into a water-alcohol solution. Then, continue to potentise the remedy to a 6X potency (tutorials 3 and 4 explain how this is done).
5. You can either continue to use the total volume of the water-alcohol solution produced at each potency stage so you end up with your full 100,000 litres or, for more manageable quantities, just save and use 10% of the liquid from each stage to produce the next potency.
6. For small gardens, add 10 ml of the 6X stock liquid to 10 litres of water and water into the ground or on the plants. A whole hectare can be treated by adding 500 ml of the 6X stock liquid to 500 litres of water.
7. If you want larger stock amounts simply start with more snail shells.
8. If you prefer to not to do it yourself, [Helix tosta is available in our online store.](#)