



Protecting Yourself from Pests in the Garden

By Jessie Eisenstein

There are all sorts of ways to keep pests from damaging your garden; some work and some don't. It's usually a matter of trial and error. But what about protecting yourself?

Nasty insects like mosquitoes can take some of the enjoyment out of gardening. These blood-sucking pests take only a minimal amount of blood, but leave itchy, painful welts on your skin. In some cases, they can even cause bacterial, viral and parasitic infections. How do they find you?

Mosquitoes are attracted to the warmth of your body and the carbon dioxide from your breath. But rather than holding your breath, try some simple strategies to reduce the number of mosquitoes in your back yard.

Because mosquitoes lay their eggs in or close to stagnant water, take measures to eliminate these breeding grounds from your garden. For instance, if you have a birdbath, consider installing a pump to constantly circulate the water — birds will appreciate it, too. Or be sure to empty and refill the bath weekly.

If you have a pond, add mosquito fish or guppies to eat mosquito larvae. Don't leave empty containers around the garden; turn them over so they won't fill with rainwater. And use an insect repellent to keep mosquitoes away from your skin. A word on electric bug zappers: they actually attract and kill more beneficial insects than pests. You probably don't need one.

What about bees? You need them to pollinate your flowers, fruits and vegetables, but there are a few things you should know to avoid being stung. Don't wear perfume in the garden, and wear light-colored clothing — bees are attracted to darker colors.

Bees seldom sting while they are visiting flowers — they sting only in self-defense.

If stung, don't attempt to remove the stinger by pulling it or squeezing your skin; doing so will inject more venom. Instead, scrape off the stinger with your fingernail and apply an anti-histamine ointment or a paste of meat tenderizer and water to the sting. A cool compress will relieve some of the pain and itching.

After a bee sting, if you experience shortness of breath (anaphylactic shock), go to a hospital emergency room immediately for treatment. If you know you are allergic to bee stings, talk to your doctor about having an emergency bee sting kit on hand that contains epinephrine.

Birds and bats can also help you battle bugs. Birds are natural insect predators, so welcome them into your yard with suet cakes, bird houses, birdbaths and berry-producing native shrubs and trees, which add color to your garden.

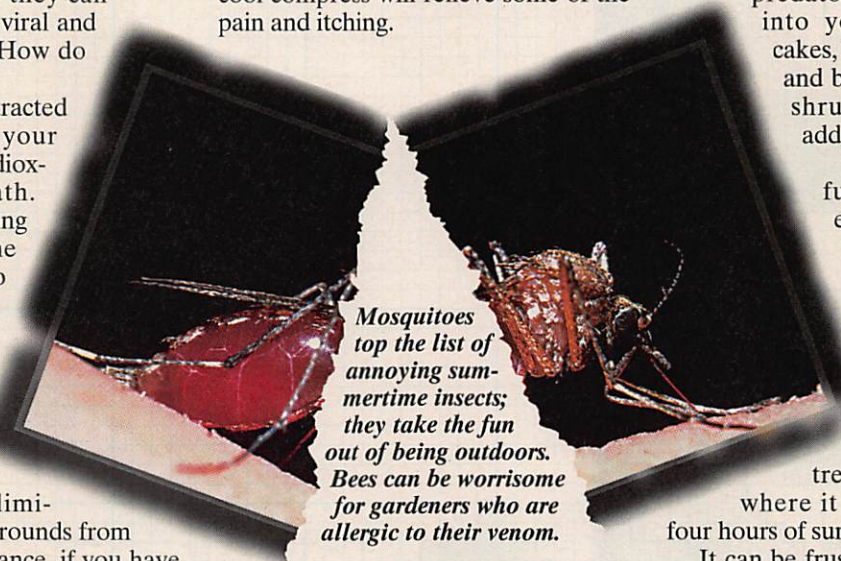
Bats are equally helpful. Not only do they eat nocturnal flying insects, they also pollinate some fruiting plants. A bat house should be placed on the sunny east or south side of your house or a large nearby tree. Be sure to place it

where it will receive at least four hours of sunshine each day.

It can be frustrating, but you have only limited control over the pests in your yard. If your neighbor has conditions conducive to mosquito breeding — even if you have taken every precaution — the pests will still visit your yard. But don't lose heart — in seven more months the insects will be gone again for winter!

Editor's note: For more tips on protecting yourself from pests in the garden, consult your cooperative extension office, your state National Wildlife Federation affiliate or local experts.

Suggested reading: *Rebugging Your Home and Garden, A Step By Step Guide to Modern Pest Control* by Ruth Troetschler is available by mail from PTF Press, 184 Lockhart Lane, Los Altos, CA 94022. Cost is \$19.95 plus \$2.50 shipping. California residents add \$1.55 sales tax.



Mosquitoes top the list of annoying summertime insects; they take the fun out of being outdoors. Bees can be worrisome for gardeners who are allergic to their venom.



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