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Extension Solutions for Homes and Gardens

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“Integrated Pest Management for Farms, Homes, and Gardens”

What is a pest? From an agricultural perspective, a pest is any insect, weed, pathogen, or animal that compromises the health or economic profitability of a commodity. Some people might consider their families, friends, pets, and homes as important commodities. Farmers would consider their livestock, crops (the food we eat), and land as important commodities for their livelihood. Conservationists often consider native and/or endangered species, water quality, delicate ecosystems, and natural resources as important commodities.

All of these commodities can be affected by a number of pest problems. It’s been said that pest control services in the United States are a multi-billion dollar industry—yes, worth more than Bill Gates! So, since we are all impacted by pests in our every day lives, we all need to know more about the concept of integrated pest management (IPM).

IPM is all about using multiple tactics or “all the tools in your toolbox” to prevent and control a pest problem. The number one thing you can do is prevention. Many pests can be prevented with just a little time and effort. The most important IPM component is catching the problem early through awareness and pest monitoring.

Is your neighbor’s backyard being taken over by Kudzu? If so, you may want to talk to your neighbor about controlling the problem (or asking them if they need help), because before you know it, your house will be covered too. Are your flower beds being taken over with weeds? If so, you might want to consider using a pre-emergent herbicide and mulch in the spring to avoid a lot of hand weeding in the summer. Is your front yard being invaded by fire ants? Then you may want to consider broadcasting a fire ant bait periodically to help keep them out. Is your backyard pond or stream being taken over by weeds and exotic snails? Then maybe you shouldn’t have dumped out your aquarium last year to save your pet fish!

This time of year we get numerous calls from people with lawn diseases caused by fungal pathogens. The best way to prevent this is by using IPM cultural controls such as proper watering (1”inch per week), increasing your mowing height, and avoiding too much nitrogen fertilizer on your lawn. Also, we get a lot of calls on animals eating gardens such as raccoons, groundhogs, rabbits, and deer. If you know you have a problem with one of these nuisance animals, then you may want to use IPM controls such as exclusion, habitat modification or trapping to avoid future damage.

Remember, the control of small pest infestations is more effective and economical than control of well-established, rapidly spreading infestations. By just walking around the perimeter of your home and garden once a day to find new pests early, you can save yourself a lot of time, money, unnecessary pesticides, and frustration on pest control – the goal of IPM. If you have any questions about these and other pest problems around your home, farm, or garden, then feel free to contact your local University of Georgia County Extension office for more information.

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