

December Doldrums



The gardening period for this year is over, the crops are in, our freezers are full of the produce we raised. It's time to relax and think about next year's endeavors in tilling the land. Planning ahead for next year is the gardener's winter chore. What crops are insect resistant? What insects will I tolerate and which plants might set off a horde of six legged creatures on my property?

We must remember that many insects and other pests will be in some sort of resting stage now. Some overwinter in the pupa or cocoon stage, like cutworms, flea beetles and root weevils. Others diapause (that's a fancy name for the resting stage during winter) as eggs. Still others spend their time in the off season as adults. We all know that the ladybird beetles and boxelder bugs hibernate, since we see them getting ready for that process in October of each year. How many calls do we get about the myriads of these creatures on and in houses in the MG office every year? Some caterpillars also hibernate. Consider the woolly bear caterpillars. You know, those brown and black banded fuzzy little guys you see crossing the roads, crawling around our yards, and in general going hell bent for somewhere. They actually are just looking for a good, sheltered place to spend the winter. In spring, they resume activity and eat heartily to gain energy before they spin up a cocoon and finally become a moth.

Another method of winter survival calls for drastic measures. Hornets, for example, allow all the workers to die off during the winter. The lone survivor is the queen. She finds a shelter from the elements for the winter. On my property it seems to be my shop! In spring, she begins building a new nest and, because she is still fertile, lays eggs to form new workers. She finds food and tends them until the workers reciprocate and take care of her.

Insect lives are as varied as the soap operas on TV. Actually they are a lot more interesting than any of those shows, with truly real situations. Don't you agree? Have a great Holiday Season! See you next year!

