

Winter Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

October 16, 2013

Dormant sprays, fruit bags & little green worms

The mystery of the little green worms: Many people saw large numbers of small green caterpillars chewing numerous holes in the leaves of their cabbage family plants over the last month. This is due to a late season invasion of a small brown moth, called the diamondback moth, which happens occasionally (they blow here on the wind from the south). The caterpillars spin their small cocoons on the leaves, unlike the much bigger cabbageworms. For comparison of the 2 and a cocoon photo, see: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/leaf_chewers.html#20. Low number do little damage, but the unusually high numbers this fall have been much more damaging than usual. The biological control BTK (*Bacillus thuringiensis*/Safer's Biological Insecticide) does work on these, as do other organic sprays, but it is probably not worth spraying at this late date. Disturbingly, this species was reported feeding on pepper plants in BC greenhouses this spring, which is an extremely unusual jump to a different host plant. The problem may or may not occur again next year since DBM populations vary hugely from year to year.

Dormant sprays: People who have taken my gardening workshops know I am not a fan of routine dormant spraying for fruit trees. If trees don't have pests or disease that can be control by the sprays, then it is a needless application of pesticides. For example, dormant sprays don't work on apple scab or tent caterpillar eggs, although that is often what people are hoping to control. If you buy a 'dormant spray kit' you will see two bottles in the box: one is horticultural oil, the other is lime-sulphur. You can use them separately and they can also be purchased separately. Here are a couple of problems for which dormant lime-sulphur sprays are useful:

Pearleaf blister mites: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/gall_makers.html#100 Spray lime-sulphur immediately after leaves drop (October/November); if this timing is missed, spray just before buds swell in the spring (March). In mid-winter the mites are out of reach of sprays, deep inside bud scales.

Pear scab: <http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/foilage.html#133> Spray dormant trees with lime-sulphur in mid-winter to control the overwintering fungus on the branches. The fungus also overwinters on leaves dropped below the trees so rake up and compost the leaves or mow over them to shred them so they decompose during the winter. Do this for apple scab too, but don't bother spraying the dormant trees since apple scab is a different fungus and doesn't overwinter on the branches.

This is where you can use the bottle of horticultural oil in the kit:

Soft brown scale on citrus trees: http://www.lindagilkeson.ca/sap_suckers.html#57 If you are growing citrus in pots or in greenhouses, you may have noticed the sticky leaves and little brown bumps on the twigs that indicate an infestation of scale. Unlike soap, horticultural oil sprays are very effective on scale if you do a good job of covering the undersides of leaves and twigs. Be sure to mix the oil according to the 'growing season' rate on the label and NOT for dormant sprays, which would fry the leaves.

Pesticide Review: The provincial government has posted the latest "intentions paper" for the proposed changes to pesticide regulations in British Columbia at <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/codes/ipmr/index.htm> We have until December 8th to provide comments. Among other things the proposal includes extending the list of 'safe' pesticides to add the newest least toxic and non-toxic products that were not on the list drawn up back in 2006; this means they could be used in municipalities that restrict pesticide use for landscapes and home gardens. For

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example, "Domestic" labelled products containing spinosad, chelated iron (for weeds), kaolin clay and others would be on the safe list.

At the same time the proposal would remove the ability of a home gardener to buy products that have a "Commercial" label. This stops untrained people from getting their hands on large quantities of problematical chemicals, but it will also mean that home gardeners would not be able to buy "Commercial" formulations of products containing the ingredients that are on the 'safe' list. For example, a Commercial product, called Serenade SOIL, contains the fungus fighting bacteria *Bacillus subtilis* and is registered to control a variety of root diseases, such as *Phytophthora*, Botrytis root rot, etc. . In the US, the product is also labelled for clubroot of cabbage and according to local growers (who I won't name because the product is not currently registered for this use in Canada) has been effective in their commercial fields to prevent infection by clubroot. Unless a "Domestic" labelled soil product is registered by the manufacturer, the home gardener would not have access to this biological control.

Pest Bags: In preparation for avoiding fruit pests next spring, you might want to stock up on bags from the following wholesale source. They sell cheap organza gift bags with a drawstring that worked really well on apples, figs and grape bunches in my garden to keep out insects and birds. I don't know how long the bags will last, but the ones I used this year look as good as new after a season of use.

Matthew Store Fixtures & Shelving: www.matthewsdisplay.com/ Phone: 250-388-4123 or 1-800-964-1281 You can order online or for Victoria gardeners, visit them at 810 Shamrock St. (Just off Oak St. between Saanich and Cloverdale)

2014 Year Round Harvest courses: The Salt Spring class is full with a wait list, as is one of the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific classes. There is still space in a second class that will run at the HCP so if you are interested, contact them immediately. Classes are held on one Sunday afternoon each month, from January to October. For more info on topics and to register see: <http://hcp.ca/commed-year-round-harvest>

NEW: More photos of pests and diseases have been added to the image bank on my web site to help you with identification.

AND you can now use PayPal to buy mail order books by credit card through my web site.

To see my upcoming schedule of workshops and gardening classes or order books:
www.lindagilkeson.ca

All of my previous messages are archived on my web site under the Gardening Tips page and are available through the Salt Spring Energy Strategy website: www.saltspringenergystrategy.org