From the Director

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Integrated Pest Management Strategies for a Safer Garden

After a cool spring, the fruits and vegetables in your garden are finally ripening and ready for harvest and culinary delights. You want to avoid another invasion by a variety of pests that decimated your tomatoes, lettuce, herbs and assorted flowers last summer.

Before planting my garden every year, I decide how I want to manage pests. Totally organic? Some pesticides? For me, using pesticides to control unwanted “guests” is a last resort. I use integrated pest management (IPM), a combination of natural and preventive strategies and pesticides less toxic than traditional treatments.

For example, I apply two to three inches of mulch to prevent weeds and make it easier to pull the ones that manage to poke through because the soil stays moist. To attract ladybugs and other beneficial insects, I include plants in my garden that attract them.

If you choose to use pesticides to control the assault on your garden, use products that pose the least risk to you and your family, pets and the environment. The first step is identifying the pest so you can select a product that best targets the problem. An excellent source of information on pests and pest control is the University of California’s Online Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program at http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/.

Let’s say you select a microbial pesticide that I favor, Bacillus thuringienis – or Bt – favored by organic gardeners. Although Bt is organically approved, it is a pesticide and it’s important that you read the entire label and follow the instructions carefully.

Some products come ready to use. If you’re using a product that requires mixing, the label will tell you how much to mix, whether you can store it and about proper disposal if you’ve mixed too much. The best kind of disposal is no disposal: use the entire product for its intended purpose.

All pesticides, even organically approved products, should never be stored in food or drink containers. We receive reports every year about poisonings of children and adults who mistakenly drank a pesticide stored in a soda bottle or other container.

If you have questions about how to use, store or dispose pesticides, call your county agricultural commissioner who enforces pesticide laws and regulations at the local level. Commissioners’ phone numbers are in the phone book under county government headings or call toll-free at 1-87PESTLine to get the number and connected with your commissioner’s office. A list of agricultural commissioners is also posted on our Web site under “ag commissioners” at www.cdpr.ca.gov.

Happy, safe gardening!

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