

Tony's 'gardening without chemicals' tips

It is easy to garden without pesticides, weed killers and chemical fertilisers. You just have to want to do it. And now we know that by using garden chemicals we are destroying our soils, the worms, the bees and other pollinators and millions of birds and animals, you should find the incentive to stop.

Here are my top tips on pests and diseases. Other gardeners will have similar examples:

1. New seedlings may need some protection from slugs and snails, such as a cloche, or broken eggshells, but once plants get a little bigger and stronger they can look after themselves.
2. I put netting over brassicas, raspberries, strawberries, black currants, gooseberries and blueberries but other fruits such as figs and apples are mainly left alone by the birds and insects.
3. My favourite vegetables to grow are runner beans, French beans, tomatoes, spinach, lettuce, rocket, beetroot and courgettes and I hardly ever have any problems from pests and disease with these, though I have occasionally introduced nematodes in Spring to reduce snails and slugs (buy online).
4. My roses get some black spot and nibbled leaves but I'm so busy enjoying the roses to worry about a few imperfect leaves. My tomatoes and flowers benefit from natural fertilisers such as liquid seaweed, which you can buy or make your own feed from nettles or comfrey which you soak for a few weeks, then use the liquid diluted with one part feed to ten parts water.
5. I encourage birds and insects into my garden with bird food and lots of flowers, preferably old style flowers which contain nectar, and together they eat most of the greenfly and other aphids which can weaken your plants. Sit back and enjoy the show!

