

## Natural Insect Repellents

As promised last month, here are a few recipes for eco-friendly substitutes for branded pesticides and herbicides.

Remember pesticides are not only poisonous to insects and pests but are also harmful to humans and animals. They can affect us if we breathe them in or through skin contact. Common pesticides and herbicides used in the garden, e.g. aphid killers and weed killers, contain chemicals that have been proven or are suspected to cause a variety of severe health related problems. Some chemicals are even said to increase the incidence of certain cancers. One only needs to read the warnings on the containers to know that the products are hazardous.

Another concern is that many ingredients stay active in the environment for a long time. Pesticides and herbicides used in the garden can contaminate our streams and rivers when they leach out of the soil. Likewise contamination occurs when the containers used to dispense the products are rinsed out under the tap.

So let's see how we can make a change by using recipes that are not only safe but are also easy on the pocket. The following suggestions are taken from "The Guineafowl", a newsletter published by the KZN Conservancies Association.

"A number of non-toxic substances can be used to repel insects. Many are herbs and spices that have a strong smell e.g. powdered chilli pepper, garlic, peppermint, bay leaves, cloves, citrus oil, lavender, rosemary, peppercorns and cedar oil.

For specific house pests:

- For ants: sprinkle red chilli powder, paprika, dried peppermint, borax or even talcum powder where ants are found entering in the home.
- For fishmoths: air clothes well in the sun, use sachets of lavender or cedar chips, and Epsom salts placed in the bottom of drawers is also a good deterrent.
- For fleas: give pets Brewer's yeast and garlic pills
- For rats and mice: prevention is the best cure. Seal all possible entry points and containers and don't leave rubbish or food lying about. Many of us at Le Dom enjoy feeding the birds but putting out seed, fruit and cheese and leaving these overnight is one of the reasons we have so many rats. The one thing that must NOT be used to eradicate rats is "Rattex". It is highly toxic to birds and dogs that may feed on these poisoned rats. We do have owls here and it would be tragic if they were killed by our actions. Only if it is the last resort, then a product called "Racumin" would be a more acceptable choice.

In the garden:

- For slugs and snails: the best option is to "import" carnivorous snails from some one's indigenous garden, but these are hard to come by. If you aren't too squeamish, squash the offending beasties or pour half a cup of black caffeinated coffee on them. Scattering crushed egg shell around seedlings works very well. A saucer of beer is highly attractive to snails so use this to attract the little beasties and then dispose of them.
- An easy all purpose garlic spray for repelling insects from plants can be made by mixing half a cup of finely chopped garlic with 500ml water. Let this mixture stand for an hour, strain, pour into a spray bottle and spray the plants.
- Use compost and mulch to improve plant and soil health which will reduce the need for pesticides and fertilisers.
- Use plants that repel insects. Some herbs and flowers including basil, mint, garlic, marigolds and chrysanthemums mixed in with other plants help.
- Use disease and pest resistant plants. This is where it pays to go indigenous as these plants are able to withstand many of the diseases and pests which exotic plants such as roses cannot do.
- For weeds: pull out by hand; spray vinegar onto the leaves of larger weeds, making sure to coat the leaves evenly. This works best on hot, sunny days and the weeds should die in a week or two. Alternatively a hot salty solution also works well.

These are just a few ideas that could make a difference to the environment in our war against unwanted pests and weeds.

Extract from "French Connection" - inhouse newsletter for Le Domaine, Hillcrest

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