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Control Most Garden Insects with a “Wash Or A Lube”

To control many pesky garden pests, wash'em with insecticidal soap or lube 'em up with horticulture oil. Horticultural Oils, Insecticidal Soaps and Bt Products are environmentally friendly products that will control many garden pests.

Horticultural oil is a petroleum-based oil with an emulsifier added that allows it to mix with water. It is designed to be applied to plants. It kills scales, mites, aphids, whiteflies and other soft-bodied pests that are present by suffocation, plugging up the insects breathing pores.

There are two classifications of horticultural oils: dormant oils, summer oils or superior oils. Dormant oils are the heaviest of the horticultural oils. The first dormant oils were motor oils. Apply during winter dormancy and before plants begin spring growth. Do not use dormant oils during the growing season unless the label specifically states that such use is safe. Some plants will shed their leaves if sprayed in the summer. Summer oils are lighter than dormant oils and are formulated for use during spring and summer. Superior oils are the most refined of all petroleum oils and are excellent products for horticultural pest control in any season. Superior oil products allow greater flexibility in their use and have been tested at temperatures in the mid 90s with no damage to shrubs. If you are unsure if the product will work on a plant, spray a small area and wait 48 hours. If no damage occurs the product is safe to use on the plant.

Only a few of the soaps manufactured are effective insecticides. Insecticidal soaps basically are made from potassium salt of oleic acid, which is present in high quantities in olive and other vegetable oils. Insecticidal soap causes insects to dehydrate by physically breaking down the insect's outer protective layer (cuticle).

Thorough spray coverage is essential when using oils and soaps. Since these products are not poisons and must contact the pest, all plant surfaces, tops and bottom sides of leaves and stems must be coated with spray for best results.

Horticultural oils are sold under various descriptive names such as “dormant oil,” “oil emulsion,” “pesticidal oil,” “summer oil” and “superfine oil.” There are several soaps available for purchase, such as Safers Insecticidal Soap and M-Pede.

Another environmentally friendly product for controlling caterpillars is Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). Bt is an insecticide stomach poison for use only against caterpillars. Bt should be used when the caterpillars are young. The caterpillar must ingest the Bt for it to be effective. After ingesting a lethal dose of Bt, the caterpillar stops feeding and will die within several hours to days. Bt can be found under several brand names such as Dipel, Thuricide and Sok-BT

Though horticultural oils, soaps and Bt products are less toxic than many insecticides, it is important to use them with caution. Read and follow the label carefully. The label is the law.