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more**

*For the avid gardener*

### Biological Insect Controls

Now that (to coin the old phrase) "Spring is sprung," you're probably being bombarded with all sorts of gardening catalogs and mail order seed offers, but one which needs special attention and special warning are "inexpensive" offerings of biological controls. People tend to turn toward these offers because they imply a "natural" control for the garden.

But, some items sold by mail order firms as "biological controls" for insects may be over-rated, says a University of Maryland insect specialist.

Lee Hellman, Extension entomologist at the campus, says that many firms sell beneficial insects that eat harmful insects. "The theory is fine," says Hellman, "but there are lots of problems in the practice."

One "biological control" (as opposed to chemical controls, such as insecticides) is the ladybird beetle, more commonly called the ladybug. In California, the beetles eat insect pests called aphids during the summer. In fall, the adults migrate to the mountains and hibernate over winter. In spring, the beetles thaw out and fly to the valleys to lay eggs.

Mail order firms collect hibernating beetles and ship them East for home gardeners to release in their gardens to eat aphids. But when they're released, says Hellman, "they take off and try to find California's Central Valley

They don't hang around the garden long enough to do any good."

Another poor bet is praying mantis egg cases offered for purchase by mail. Several hundred eggs may be contained in one egg cluster, and this leads homeowners to think that they'll have lots of hungry mantids around the yard during the summer to eat mosquitoes and other noxious insects pests.

Not necessarily so, says Hellman. "As soon as the young praying mantis hatch, they'll eat anything. That usually means they end up eating each other — very few survive to eat pest insects."

Those that do, adds the entomologist, seem to defend territories and drive out others of their kind. By midsummer, there are only one or two mantids in an average garden or lawn, anyway.

Hellman points out that gardeners would be better off finding their own praying mantis egg cases in fencerows and abandoned lots. Look for hardened masses of froth attached to twigs and goldenrod stems, he suggests.

Some insect predators offered in the trade can be more beneficial. Hellman recommends lacewing eggs, for example.

"Here's an insect that feeds on aphids for its whole life," he says. "The young hatchlings can't travel far, and even the adults are poor flyers. Most of the lacewings remain in the general vicinity of their hatching."

## Pa. apple holdings down 19 percent

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania apples in cold storage on Feb. 28 totaled 99,827,000 pounds, down 23,564,000 pounds or 19 percent from a year ago, according to the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service.

Of that total, York Imperial apples, at 40,320,000 pounds, comprise the largest variety in cold storage for fresh market and processing. They are followed by Red Delicious apples at 15,246,000, Rome apples

at 14,196,000 pounds and Golden Delicious apples at 12,768,000 pounds.

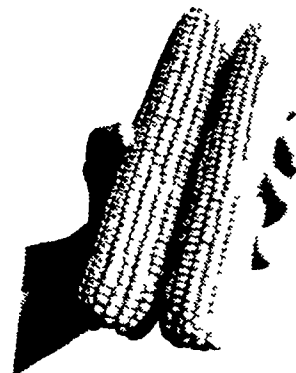
Apples in cold storage in the continental United States on Feb. 28 totaled 1,648,926,000 pounds, down 386,911,000 pounds or 19 percent.

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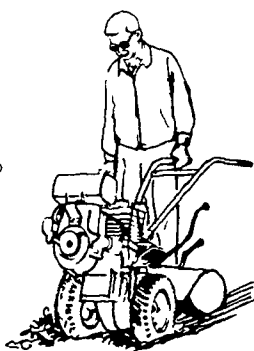
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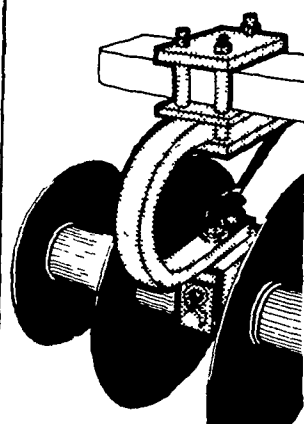
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