

**All Gardens  
Great & Small**  
by  
York Co.  
Horticultural Agent  
**Tom Becker**



**Creating Healthy Landscapes**

Manage the health and beauty of trees, shrubs, and flowers with soil testing and minimal pesticide use. One method called integrated pest management (IPM); involves looking at the total landscape; identifying the insect the mite, disease, or growing condition that appears to be causing a problem; and if any action need to be taken, choosing from a variety of sound management strategies. This

approach takes into account that only three to five percent of insect species are harmful and that most pests have natural enemies such as birds, toads, and beneficial insects to keep them in check.

Here are five steps to take better care of your landscape plants:

- Choose Trees And Shrubs Wisely
- Plant Trees and Shrubs With Care
- Promote Healthy Plants

- Clean Up Plant Debris
- Monitor Pest And Beneficial Insect

Select plants that are suited to the conditions in your landscape. For instance, if the soil is acidic, choose plants that prefer acid conditions. If most of the area is shaded, then you need plants that prefer shade. Plants placed in the wrong location will not thrive and will be susceptible to many problems in the future. Select plant cultivars that are known to be less susceptible to insects, mites, and diseases. Also, consider growing plants that are native to your area, or native with similar growing conditions.

Help plants get a good start by planting them correctly. Mistakes made when planting or when applying mulch can result in weakened plants that are prone to problems.

Healthy, vigorous plants are less vulnerable to damage caused by insects, mites, and diseases. Provide the best growing conditions by soil testing for

pH level and the nutrients in the soil, preparing soil well before planting and then using fertilizer only as needed. A soil test is available at Penn State Cooperative Extension for \$6 each. Water plants regularly until they become established. Follow proper pruning recommendations.

Debris that builds up in the landscape may harbor pests and plant diseases. Remove dead or dying plants. Rake and remove leaves that drop off plants. If a branch is broken or diseased, prune it. Use organic mulches that have been composited properly. Apply a layer no deeper than two or three inches, making sure the mulch does not touch the trunk or main stem of the plant.

Inspect plants regularly throughout the season for beneficial insects, mites, diseases, or any unusual changes in appearance that might indicate a problem. Accurate identification of

the cause is essential for evaluating the situation and determining what, if any, management tactics are needed. Be aware that if a pest shows up, natural enemies that prey on it often appear as well. To monitor the health of plants in a landscape, you also must be able to recognize these beneficial insects. You may need to tolerate some plant injury before populations of beneficial insects and mites build up enough to keep a pest in check.

It is important to understand the biology of many different plants. Additionally, knowing how pests and plants are affected by weather is important. For a series of healthy landscape factsheets, contact your local Extension Office or call York County Cooperative Extension, at (717) 840-7408.

Any questions can be directed to Thomas S. Becker, horticultural agent, Penn State Cooperative Extension, York County (717) 840-7408 or Email at Yorkmg@psu.edu.

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