In the Dirt

Water Trees in November - Trees & shrubs, especially newly planted ones, need to have moist roots in order to survive. Probe the soil around trees & shrubs to check the moisture level-it should be moist, not soggy or dry. If the ground is not frozen, water slowly to provide the necessary amount.

Where Do Insects Go For Winter?

The end of the growing season signals the end of the battle with insect pests in vegetable gardens. But the end of a battle is not the end of the war and new battles will be fought next season.

Where do all those insects retreat to for winter? Some are snowbirds and head south for the winter. Others overwinter in the garden, while some spend the winter in nearby cracks and crevices of structures and on weeds.

The snowbirds include armyworm, corn earworm (also known as tomato fruitworm) and striped and spotted cucumber beetles. Since these insects do not overwinter in the garden, sanitation is not considered a control method for these insects.

However, many insects do overwinter in the garden and cleaning up and destroying plant debris can reduce their numbers. Reducing the population of insect pests limits the amount of damage they cause and provides more control options.

Insects that overwinter on plant debris in the garden include cabbageworm, cabbage loopers, and squash bugs. The cabbage caterpillars overwinter as pupae inside cocoons attached to plant debris, usually the host plant. Squash bugs spend the winter as adults in plant debris.

Insects that overwinter in the soil are the adults of Colorado potato beetles, the eggs of grasshoppers, and the pupae of squash vine borers and onion maggots. Fall tillage of soil reduces these insects by exposing the insects to colder temperatures. Removing plant debris removes an insulating layer that also protects insects from extreme temperatures.

Bean leaf beetles spend the winter as adults in nearby sheltered areas, preferring to spend the winter in the plant litter of windbreaks and woodlands.

Some insects spend the winter on weeds near the garden. Fall sanitation not only includes cleaning up or tilling under vegetable debris in the garden, but control of nearby weeds as well.

When cleaning up plant debris, can it be added to the compost pile? The general recommendation is to not add insect infested plants, diseased plant debris, or weed seeds to home compost piles.

Most plant diseases and weed seeds, as well as some insects, are destroyed during composting when temperatures in the pile center reach 140˚ to 150˚F. However, in many home compost piles, it is difficult to mix materials thoroughly enough to bring all waste to the center where it will be exposed to these temperatures.

Finally, it is often asked if insecticides applied to bare soil in fall will kill overwintering insects. The answer is not very often, if at all. Overwintering insects are often in the pupae or egg stage where they are protected from insecticides. Applying insecticides to soil to try and control overwintering insects is not a responsible or effective use of a pesticide.

Source: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Wolf Spiders

Wolf spiders are one of the most common spiders found across Nebraska. They usually elicit alarm and stress among homeowners because of their large size, quick movement, and hairy bodies. There are several different species of Wolf spiders in our area, so most people do not always recognize all of them as Wolf spiders. These spiders are harmless to people or pets. However, many people fear harmless spiders because of misunderstandings concerning danger. In reality, there are only a few species of spiders that warrant caution. Wolf spiders are a desirable part of the ecosystems in which they occur. They feed on insects, including species which are pests of plants, and nuisance species such as biting flies, as well as other spiders and scorpions. Therefore, these spiders are generally considered to be beneficial organisms.

Sanitation and habitat modification are key tactics for control of spiders indoors. This includes vacuuming in corners, window sills, and attic areas, and keeping the premises free of clutter such as undisturbed clothing, papers, and other litter. The corners and crawl spaces of buildings should be kept free of spider webs. This may be accomplished by simply dusting these areas or by using a vacuum to remove existing webs. Vacuuming removes active spider webs, adult spiders, and spider egg sacs. Living spiders will desiccate quickly in the vacuum bag, but depending on the design of the vacuum, it may be useful to empty the bag immediately after use in order to prevent the spiders' escape.

Removing litter such as newspaper and wood from the interior and the sides of buildings is also crucial for effective elimination of spiders. Pruning shrubbery and other plants away from buildings also will limit the access of spiders to buildings.

In addition to sanitation, creating a physical barrier to the movement of spiders into buildings is an effective management technique. Caulking, repairing screens, and filling cracks and crevices around windows, doors, and foundations with materials such as expanding polyurethane foam will exclude many spiders from buildings. Common areas to inspect for holes and gaps include entry holes for plumbing and electrical lines, and window and door casings. In window and door screens, repair any holes large enough for spiders to enter. Gaps in the wall boards and ceiling-wall interfaces should be closed, and door and window casings should be filled with caulking or a foam insulation material. Spiders can easily gain access to buildings through gaps beneath doors. Place a piece of weather stripping under a door so that there is no gap between the bottom of the door and the floor when the door is closed to alleviate this problem.

Foam insulation material can be used to fill wall voids and crawl spaces if spiders come in through these areas. If crawl spaces are a breeding area for spiders, the reason is usually excess moisture. By eliminating moisture from crawl spaces, spiders can be eliminated. Placing plastic over bare soil can eliminate moisture in some areas, such as beneath cabins. The key to solving many moisture problems is to increase venting. Therefore, opening ducts under a foundation may eliminate moisture from a crawl space, without allowing increased access of the building for spiders.

Precautionary measures to reduce the risk of being bitten by spiders include wearing shoes at all times, using leather gloves when moving rocks, wood, or other debris, and shaking out sleeping bags and clothing before using them. Chemical control of spiders inside of buildings is not recommended and should be considered only as a last resort.

Source: UNL Extension: Acreage Insights - acreage.unl.edu