

How can I control for pests in my garden?

There are many methods of organic pest control. We list a few here that are really effective, appropriate for school gardens, and that students can make by following a simple recipe. To keep pest problems to a minimum, monitor your garden regularly. Insect and disease problems are easiest to fix if caught early.

Anti-Fungal Spray

Combine four cloves of crushed garlic and a tablespoon of mineral oil and mix. Let this sit overnight. Strain the garlic from the mixture and combine one pint of water with the oil in a spray bottle. Add a teaspoon of dish soap to the bottle and mix. This garlic spray is an insecticide as well as fungicide. Use it on plants that are overwhelmed with aphids or powdery mildew.

Insecticidal Soap

Insecticidal soap has been around for centuries as a method for eliminating pests. It disrupts the membrane of soft-bodied insects and they die of dehydration. Use two tablespoons of liquid soap (not detergent) to one quart of water and put it in a spray bottle. Students can make the soap solution as well as find and spray the infestation.

Sluggo

Sluggo is a slug and snail bait that is safe to use around pets and children and is considered an organic control. This product might be an appropriate defense during a summer or spring break while the populations are really ramping up. Otherwise, we recommend that students carry out most of your slug and snail control. They quickly learn where to find the little critters, and provide the most comprehensive assault on them.

Copper Tape

Copper tape generates a small electrical charge when slugs and snails cross it. It can be useful to stop slugs and snails getting into plant pots or raised beds. It can be expensive, but is an effective way to protect seedlings, and students “get a charge” out of trying to coax their little mollusks over a strip of copper. Copper screening can also be used to fence off an area.

Biological Control/Beneficial Insect Predators

The insect world, like most of nature, is red in tooth and claw. The drama that occurs daily in the school garden between ladybug larvae and the aphids on fava beans is better than most horror movies. Developing your insectaries, or plants that are likely to attract beneficial insects (or insects that eat common garden pests), will help build your dizzyingly complex and diverse insect communities. Make the garden inviting to beneficial species such as ladybugs, wasps, lacewings, and birds that are known to feed upon pests.



Easy Organic Pest Control Methods

- Anti-Fungal Spray
- Insecticidal Soap
- Sluggo
- Copper Tape
- Biological Control/Attracting Beneficial Insects)
- Manual Removal
- Compost Tea

Manual Removal

Of course this is the most interesting and school-garden-friendly method of pest eradication. Enlist your students to find slugs, snail, cabbage loopers, aphids, earwigs, and soil grubs. Look at them with hand lenses, understand their biology, and at the end of class deposit them in a bowl. You will take care of these critters in private. Maybe there is even a parent raising chickens who would appreciate a bucket of slugs. We highly recommend this method for most pest problems.

Snails and slugs rest during the day in shady, damp places, then emerge at night to feed. A thorough garden clean-up to minimize potential habitat is also a first step in cutting down their populations.

Compost Tea

Compost tea can be applied to plant roots or leaves for a strong dose of nutrients while keeping pests away. Have students partially fill a burlap bag with finished compost. This will be the “tea bag.” Tie it off and put it in a plastic garbage can and fill it with water. After about a week the water will be a dark brown color, and your tea will have “steeped” enough.

The tea is an excellent gentle fertilizer for young seedlings, and plants benefit from that extra jolt of nutrition that it provides. What’s left in the burlap bag may be dried and spread on garden beds.

