



Garden planting starts with control of weeds, insects and diseases

Although gardening can be considered a leisure activity, it also requires a fair amount of effort. Because of the effort put in to plant a garden or install a new landscape, it can be very disheartening to have it succumb to insects, diseases and weeds.

To effectively control these nemeses of the garden, control must begin before the first seeds or plants go into the ground. Cultural control practices are ways of modifying the garden environment to hamper pests' breeding, feeding and shelter habits. Cultural control practices can help reduce the need for pesticides while still maintaining a healthy garden.

When you have a healthy garden, the crops are less susceptible to pest damage, so it makes sense that using resistant varieties and certified plants is an important cultural control method in a gardener's defense against pests.

When buying seeds or plants, try to choose those with built-in resistance to diseases and nematodes. If gardeners have to choose, it's better to forego some production capability in favor of the increased pest resistance.

During the growing season, stressed plants can lose their resistance to pests, so be sure the crop has the water and nutrients it needs. When shopping for vegetable seeds and plants, check the labels for abbreviations similar to these that are used to designate various types of pest resistance or tolerance:

- A - Alternaria stem canker; ALS - angular leaf spot; ANTH - anthracnose; CMV - cucumber mosaic virus; DM - downy mildew; F - Fusarium (race 1); FF - Fusarium (races 1 & 2); L - leafspot; MDM - maize dwarf mosaic; N - nematode; NCLB - northern corn leaf blight; PM - powdery mildew; SCLB - southern corn leaf blight; St - Stemphylium (gray leaf spot); SW - Stewart's wilt; TLS - target leaf spot; TMV - tobacco mosaic virus; and V - Verticillium

Many ornamentals are susceptible to a variety of foliar diseases. For example, garden phlox, zinnias and crapemyrtles are susceptible to the powdery mildew fungal disease. In most cases, varieties are available that are resistant to these common diseases. When visiting your local nurseries and plant stores, look for plants labeled for disease resistance. Some plants are certified or grown and inspected under sterile or quarantined conditions. Certified plants may cost more than others, but the certification guarantees they are disease-free. Strawberries and potatoes are among crops which may be offered as certified plants.

Gardeners put in so much work to make their landscapes look good and to grow productive crops. Following these steps will help ensure you have a great gardening season.