

+ farmstead



House Those Tomatoes

NOTHING IS WORSE THAN spending hours upon hours slaving over a vegetable garden to discover your hard work has been consumed seemingly overnight by critters of flight or foot.

Healthy plants may be their own best defense against insects and disease, but they are deliciously attractive to various rodents such as rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and mice, as well as birds. As any Extension agent will tell you, the best approach to handle this is to adopt an integrated pest management plan (IPM).

Fighting Tiny Pests

IPM plans prevent pests by creating environments that are not only conducive to healthy and productive plants, but also by limiting situations that encourage pests. Familiar agricultural practices can be part of an IPM. For instance, by rotating crops, you remove a suitable food source for insects

that hatched from eggs laid by last season's pests.

Most people know well the success of beneficial insects that kill or eat plant-devouring bugs. In certain situations, insecticides can also help if used sparingly. For smaller vegetable gardens, growers are encouraged to use organic options, such as soap sprays and plant-derived insecticides.

There also are benefits to growing companion plants. Grown in proximity to plants that are often the tasty targets of destructive pests, companion plants can often act as repellents. For example, marigolds discourage a wide variety of insects and nematodes near just about any vegetable. It's

Create a simple yet attractive home for your plants to help fend off winged and four-footed pests.

BY CHRIS HILL ///

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

RAY E. WATKINS, JR.