

Plant Health Care

A popular approach for keeping landscapes and gardens looking good and keeping insects and diseases to a minimum is called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). This program focuses on the pests that may be present, their life cycles, how they interact with the environment, and ways to control the pest. The goal of IPM is to reduce or manipulate pest populations to be at tolerable levels for people and their plants.

At present, the evolving technique is called Plant Health Care (PHC). This program is defined as a pro-active approach to managing tree and shrub health. PHC focuses on producing a healthy environment for the plant which in turn generates a stronger more vigorous growing plant. The plant has become the central focus of the landscape rather than the pest. Instead of responding to symptoms caused by pests, a program of preventative maintenance and monitoring is developed. If monitoring indicates pests that require attention, then an IPM approach is used to manage them. PHC provides a foundation for correcting the basic causes of the reduction in plant health and in turn produces a healthy plant.

Even after developing a healthy environment for your plants sometimes you still may need to control different pests. The difference is that the healthier plants can take a higher amount of stress from the pests before they begin to decline. This allows you more time to decide what course of action you may want to take if any. For example: Aphids begin to feed on your roses. The roses are healthy enough to take the pest pressure until lady beetles come in and feed on the aphids. By not using a pesticide you now have beneficial insects helping you control the original pests.

Producing healthy plants is the key, and to do this requires a healthy site. This is done by thoroughly assessing the site both above and below ground; an inventory of all plant material, their current health status, and the current environmental conditions they are grown in. This also includes soil pH, soil moisture, and soil compaction. From this, different sources of stress are identified, such as too much soil moisture, too high of pH, or too much shade. Changes are then made to the site to improve the plants environment so that it can thrive.

Many times the fixes are very easy, like moving a sprinkler head so it does not hit an area so often, or moving a plant to an area with more sun. Sometimes changes are not that easy or possible at all, and plant removal is the only choice. Changing soil pH is not easy to do, and if it is done, it is usually temporary and will revert back. This is why placing plants in areas compatible with their needs is so important. If a tree needs a sandy low pH soil, do not plant it in high pH clay. If a plant normally grows in a moist shady area, do not plant in an area with full sun all day. If the plants needs are followed rather than solely planting for aesthetic value, half the battle to a healthy plant is done.

Plant Health Care comes down to a few basic components. Know your site, know what plants can thrive on your site, give them what they want, and do not try to force something to live where it does not want to. Follow these rules and your landscape will become healthier and easier to maintain with less pest problems.

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Source:

- 1.) "Components of Plant Health Care." *PEP- Pesticide Education Program*. Washington State University. <http://pep.wsu.edu/factsheet/phc.html>