

Household and garden pests

Common household and garden pests can be controlled by a variety of non-poisonous means which are much safer for the environment, and for humans. Methods include simple insect traps, physical barriers, soap and oil sprays, and desiccants such as ash, flour or fine sand, which will dry out the bodies of caterpillars and slugs.

Desiccants

Wood ash, fine sand, flour and diatomaceous earth can be used to dust caterpillars and pear slugs. Diatomaceous earth is made from the ground-up skeletons of diatoms – a marine organism. It can be used as a dust or spray, but care must be taken not to breathe it in, as it can be an irritant.

Oil sprays

Oil sprays work by suffocation and are particularly effective on scale insects. White (petroleum) oil spray can be purchased from gardening suppliers, or make your own by mixing a tablespoon of liquid soap with a cup of vegetable oil. Soap helps the spray stick to insects. For every tablespoon of this mixture add a cup of water and shake well before spraying onto insects.

Pyrethrum

Pyrethrum is an insecticide (nerve poison) extracted from the pyrethrum daisy. It can be bought as dust or spray and is not toxic to humans or other mammals.

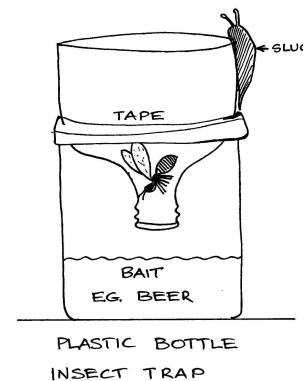
Soap spray

Soap spray kills soft-bodied insects like aphids, caterpillars, white flies and scale insects. It also helps to control sooty mould, which is spread by aphids and scale insects.

Dissolve 50 grams of pure soap (not detergent) in one litre of hot water. Allow to cool. Shake well before spraying affected plants.

Traps

Cut the top third off a plastic bottle and place the top upside down inside the bottle so the spout points down, forming a funnel shape. Seal the join with tape. Yellow tape will help attract insects to the entrance. Put enticing baits into the bottom section to lure the pests in – Vegemite™ and water or beer work well. Once inside they can't escape and will eventually drown.



Ants

As much as possible, keep the kitchen free of crumbs, spillages and tempting sugar bowls.

Place eucalyptus oil, tea tree oil or ground cloves along ant trails to discourage ants. Alternatively, follow the trail to the nest and destroy it with boiling water. You may need to dig through the nest to ensure the boiling water gets to all levels of the ant colony. (Be very careful when destroying the nests of jack jumpers and other biting ants. Wear gumboots and thick clothing.)

To poison ants, mix equal parts borax with sugar or jam. Place it out of reach of children and pets as borax is toxic. Alternatively, consider feeding the

ants outside with sugar or crumbs to negate the need for them to come indoors in search of food.

Aphids

Hose aphids off plants with a strong pressure spray of water, or use a soap spray. Be kind to ladybirds and lacewings, which eat aphids.

Borers

Paint infected timbers with two parts borax dissolved in one part methylated spirits. Or rub citronella oil on affected areas.

Caterpillars

Dust caterpillars with flour, wood ash, fine sand or diatomaceous earth to dry them out, or use a soap spray.

Codling moths

To protect apple and pear trees from codling moths, in the warmer months wrap a rag around the trunk and fold the top over. Moth larvae will hide here. Regularly remove the rag and dispose of it carefully, destroying the larvae. This breaks the codling moth lifecycle by trapping caterpillars travelling down the trunk to pupate in the soil.

Cutworms

Protect new seedlings from cutworms by placing bottomless tins or plastic bottles around the seedlings until they are strong enough to withstand attack.

Dust mites

Dust mite droppings can cause irritation and allergies in some people. Reduce the amount of dust by cleaning frequently (it helps not to have carpets in bedrooms).

Place bedding in strong sunlight regularly.

Dust with a damp cloth rather than a duster to prevent redistribution.

Flies

Use flyscreens on doors and windows to keep flies out and use a fly swat for those that get in.

Composting flies are the tiny flies found in compost. They clean up rotting fruit. Sometimes called 'vinegar flies' these are attracted to sweet, yeasty smells, so try baiting an insect trap (see above) with Vegemite™ or sugar and bran with water.

Mealy bugs

Mealy bugs are white, fluffy (like cotton wool) sap-sucking insects. They can be hosed off plants with water under strong pressure, or killed with soap spray.

Mice and rats

Mechanical spring traps which kill quickly are much more humane than slow poisoning.

Position the traps so that the rodent has to approach from the front, i.e. place it in a narrow space between a wall and another solid object. This will make sure the trap hits the rodent's neck, killing it quickly.

Mosquitoes

Natural repellents based on citronella, tea tree and lavender oil are available. Use in conjunction with the protection of long-sleeved shirts and trousers when outside.

Inside, use fly screens and mosquito nets.

Moths

Make your own moth repellent bags with dried lavender, cloves or rosemary. Place them among your clothes. A bar of scented soap placed among clothes will work as well.

Pear slugs

Use soap sprays or throw flour, wood ash or diatomaceous earth over the tree to dry out pear slugs' slimy bodies.

Scale insects

Use an oil or soap spray.

Silverfish

A glass jar with tape or string wrapped around it (to provide traction) and baited with peanut butter, will trap silverfish as they can't crawl out of the slippery glass.

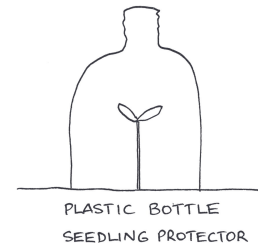
Sprinkle whole cloves or sprigs of lavender around bookshelves as a deterrent. Place infected books in direct sunlight for three hours to kill eggs and larvae.

Slugs and snails

Pour about three centimetres of beer, Vegemite™ and water, or milk into jars or yogurt containers and place them around the garden. Empty when sufficient numbers of the pests have fallen in and drowned. Alternatively, provide dark hiding places, such as narrow pots, for slugs and snails to hide in, then collect and dispose of them, or go out at night with a torch and pick them off plants.

Protect seedlings under plastic bottles with the bottom cut out.

If using commercial slug pellets, place them in a tin and squash the rim together.



This will allow the slugs to get in but keep out pets and birds.

Wasps (European)

Destroy nests at night when there is less possibility of the wasps retaliating.

Sprinkle pyrethrum dust around the entrance of the nest. When wasps enter the nest they will take the poison inside on their feet.

Some people suggest pouring petrol into the nest at night, then blocking the entrance. (Do not light the petrol.) This will poison the wasps but will poison the soil as well.

More information

More information available in the Sustainable Living Tasmania Environment Resource Library.