
PRESS RELEASE

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HOLISTIC PLANT MANAGEMENT APPROACH CUTS INSECTICIDE USE 95 PERCENT

When long time Portland arborist Terrill Collier, a Lake Oswego resident, decided to break with the industry standard of applying broad-spectrum pesticides throughout the year in favor of a more holistic approach to tree and shrub health, the results surprised even him.

Using pest management techniques developed by two University of Maryland entomologists, the Oregon State University trained president of Collier Arbor Care has been able to cut pesticide use by up to 95 percent for customers who choose his firm's Total Plant Health Care program, which is based on the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques pioneered in Maryland.

Collier's program encourages plants' natural abilities to ward off problems through the prescriptive use of organic and many near organic products, slow release organic-based fertilizer and regular checkups.

"It's more a holistic approach to plant and environmental management, making sure trees and shrubs are in the right locations in terms of light, water and soil, using plants which are less susceptible to insects and disease while promoting a healthy environment which promotes plants' natural defenses," said the 46-year-old Collier, president of the Pacific Northwest chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture.

Instead of periodic spraying with broad-based insecticides, the system also relies on more targeted and more organic remedies for insect and disease control when necessary.

"When we began our IPM-based program, we also could see the handwriting on the wall foretelling an end to use of many popular chemical-based insecticides. So, we started trying to find the safest, most environmentally friendly material available. Our early research has really paid off because a lot of chemical sprays which were being used are now disallowed by government agencies," Collier said.

For example, recent banning of the popular and widely used insecticide dursban didn't effect Collier's firm much because he hadn't been using it for years in the plant health care department, he said with some pride.

Probably half the insecticides Collier uses today are considered organic, such as a botanical insecticide called a pyrethrum, derived from chrysanthemum plants. Most others are based on naturally occurring compounds.

"Some arborists, including us, offer totally organic programs, although most of what we now use are synthesized from or based on natural compounds, even though they can't technically be called 'organic'," he said.

Collier's crews also use a lot of soaps and oils, considered organic, which control soft body insects like aphids, scales and mites. They are effective and completely non-toxic and, contrary to fairly widely held belief, are usually just as effective—in some cases more so—than their banned predecessors.

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The perception that we're banning our most effective insecticides just isn't true. Insect and disease management just becomes a little more sophisticated and many of the remedies now are more specific in what they attack.

"Just as our doctors have begun emphasizing disease prevention, arborists have shifted their focus away from treating the disease to creating conditions which prevent the insect infestation or disease in the first place." Collier said..

And where disease and insect problems erupt, the IPM-based systems emphasize early intervention and what he calls "prescriptive" treatments, aimed narrowly at specific problems, rather than broad spectrum remedies still used by much of the industry.

"You know, most plants are pretty hardy. If their overall growing environment is good, they're much less likely to get sick. They're a lot like people in that respect," he said.

Key ingredients in creating the kind of environment to encourage plant health include regular plant health care and soil assessments along with subsurface fertilization or use of mycorrhizae, a beneficial and natural root fungus which forms associations with roots, helping them absorb water and nutrients as well as helping protect from certain diseases and assisting young plants to get established.

"This fungus is found in a natural forest system. When you plant trees in an urban setting, soil often has been scraped off, compacted or changed in ways which kill this fungus. We put it back," he said.

There are eight visits yearly under the firm's IPM-based Total Plant Management Program, allowing Collier's teams of arborists to do regular checkups of plant health. Cost for an average residential plot will be about \$800-\$900 annually, including most treatments.

Disease and insect infestations also are caught early with regular check-ups, "sort of the same result as regular dental checkups."

After or during the visits, his team works with the homeowner deciding on an environmentally friendly course of action to tackle any problems which have been found.

Even though the popularity of the Total Plant Management approach has grown four-fold in the last 10 years, Collier still offers targeted pest control programs which treat such regularly recurring problems as root weevil. Average cost is \$200-\$300 per year.

He compares his work to that of medical doctors, "only we're dealing with hundreds of different plants, disease and cultural situations," rather than being able to specialize in one area.

The 64-year-old Collier Arbor Care is one of the metropolitan area's oldest and largest firms specializing in tree, shrub and lawn care.