

For News Release
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Panola Horticulture News:

Garden Pest Alert: Protect Your Plants from Insect Damage

By: Lee Dudley CEA – Ag & NR Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Panola County

Attention, gardening enthusiasts: Beware! Your beautiful garden may be facing an unseen invasion. Insects, the tiny foes of greenery, pose a significant threat to our plants, feeding voraciously and leaving destruction in their wake.

Insects, ranging from those that chew on leaves and stems to those that suck the life out of plants, are relentless in their attacks, targeting gardens year-round. Some pests target the tender sprouts and seedlings, while others set their sights on mature plants and fruits.

To combat this menace, it's crucial for gardeners to recognize the signs of insect infestation. Look out for stunted growth, deformed leaves, yellowing, or wilting plants. If your garden exhibits any of these symptoms, it's time for a thorough inspection.

In understanding the enemy, gardeners can categorize insect pests into two main groups: the chewers and the suckers. Armed with this knowledge, gardeners can better tailor their defense strategies.

Cultural methods offer a frontline defense against insects, albeit requiring extra time and effort. Techniques such as weed control, selecting appropriate plant varieties, and maintaining optimal fertilizer and water levels can help mitigate insect damage. Additionally, physically removing pests by hand or with a gentle hose wash can provide effective control.

However, in some cases, chemical intervention becomes necessary to stem the tide of infestation. Before resorting to pesticides, gardeners must exercise caution, ensuring proper usage and adherence to safety guidelines. It's imperative to read and follow the label instructions diligently, keeping these potent substances out of the reach of children and pets.

For those seeking further guidance on managing garden pests, the Panola County AgriLife Extension Service stands ready to assist. Contact them at (903) 693-0380 for expert advice and support.

Protect your plants, safeguard your sanctuary—let's keep our gardens thriving and insect-free!

Panola Natural Resource News:

Optimizing Pond Stocking: Expert Strategies for Sustainable Fishery Management in Panola County

By: Lee Dudley CEA – Ag & NR Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Panola County

As the arrival of spring ushers in a season of renewal, many Panola County landowners are preparing to embark on the journey of stocking their ponds with fish. However, according to Todd Sink, Ph.D., an aquaculture specialist at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, success in pond establishment requires more than just tossing fish into the water—it demands careful planning and a strategic approach.

Sink emphasizes the importance of patience and foresight, noting that a well-executed plan can lead to a thriving ecosystem teeming with fish, while hasty decisions can result in unbalanced populations and poor fishing for years to come. The key, Sink suggests, lies in creating an optimal environment and food chain before introducing any fish.

A meticulous approach is essential, with Sink advising that it may take up to three years before sportfish like largemouth bass can be harvested. But as the saying goes, good things come to those who wait. Rushing the process by stocking the wrong fish or in the wrong order can lead to long-term consequences that require intensive management to rectify.

Before any fish are introduced, Sink emphasizes the critical importance of focusing on the pond's environment. This begins with conducting water sample analyses to assess the pond's chemistry—a step especially crucial in regions like East Texas, where acidic soils can lead to low alkalinity and acidic waters. By determining factors such as pH levels and alkalinity, landowners can preemptively address any issues before stocking fish, ensuring an optimal environment for both fish and the pond's food chain.

To enhance the pond's productivity, Sink recommends implementing a fertilization program. By introducing phosphorus into the water, landowners can stimulate phytoplankton blooms, which serve as the foundation of the pond's food chain. This not only provides essential food for baitfish and sportfish but also helps limit the establishment of nuisance vegetation by blocking sunlight to the pond's bottom.

Timing is crucial when it comes to fertilization, Sink advises, with optimal conditions typically occurring in the spring when water temperatures range between 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit. Fertilizing below or above this temperature range may yield ineffective results or even exacerbate vegetative growth, leading to complications down the line.

When it finally comes time to stock fish, Sink advocates for a gradual approach, cautioning against the temptation to introduce all species at once. Instead, he recommends starting with fathead minnows to establish a prey base, followed by bluegill and redear sunfish. It's essential to maintain a balance, as overstocking predatory fish like bass and catfish can disrupt the ecosystem, leading to stunted populations.

As for stocking bass and catfish, Sink advises waiting until the following spring or early summer. Proper ratios should be observed, with one largemouth bass recommended for every 10 sunfish stocked. While catfish can be added later, landowners should be mindful of their intended harvest size, as larger catfish can deplete the pond's baitfish population.

For those eager to expedite the process, Sink suggests stocking adult bluegill and redear sunfish alongside fathead minnows. This approach can shave off a year from the establishment timeline but comes with increased initial costs. Regardless of the method chosen, maintaining balance and avoiding overstocking is paramount to ensuring a healthy and sustainable fish population.

In addition to stocking fish, Sink underscores the importance of proper pond management. This includes regular harvesting of bass to maintain a healthy food chain and controlling aquatic vegetation to prevent oxygen depletion—a common cause of fish kills, especially during hot summer nights.

Lastly, Sink issues a word of caution regarding the stocking of crappie, advising against it in ponds smaller than 20 acres. Their prolific breeding habits can quickly lead to overpopulation, resulting in stunted fish populations and a compromised ecosystem. In such cases, starting over may be the most effective solution to restore balance and ensure the long-term health of the pond.

In conclusion, stocking and managing a pond is a complex undertaking that requires careful planning, patience, and adherence to best practices. By following expert advice and taking a measured approach, landowners can create thriving ecosystems that provide abundant fishing opportunities for years to come.

For those seeking further guidance on wildlife management or related agricultural topics, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension stands ready to assist at their Carthage location. Whether visiting in person or contacting by phone, their experts provide valuable resources and support to the community. For more information, contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension at 316 W. Sabine St. Carthage, TX, or call (903) 693-0380.

Upcoming AgriLife Programs:

5/6: Master Gardeners Cut Flowers Tour, 9:30am, Scratch House Flowers, Waskom

5/8: Matter of Balance Class, 9:30-11am, Central Baptist Church Family Life Center

5/8: Diabetes Support Group, 10:00am, Sammy Brown Library

5/9: 4-H Cookin' Night, 5:30pm, Panola County Extension Office

5/10: Master Gardeners Meeting, noon, Sammy Brown Library

5/15: Matter of Balance Class, 9:30-11am, Central Baptist Church

5/17: Pinewoods Cattlemen's Conference, 8:00am. Sunnyhill Ranch, 7611 St. Hwy 94 Lufkin, TX

5/21: Horticulture in the Evening, 5:30pm, Sammy Brown Library