

Mystery garden pest loves kale

Can someone please tell me what’s eating my newly-planted cabbage and kale? I can probably figure out what to do, if only I knew what I’m up against.

It’s not that I haven’t been doing garden diagnostic professionally for over forty years; seems like I’ve seen it all, and usually, sometimes with help from others, I’ve been able to cobble together workable approaches towards solving nearly any garden challenge.

Of course, there isn’t always a satisfactory solution. Can’t tell you how many times I’ve given the best advice available, that which I take myself in my own garden, only to have “Well, you’re not much help” thrown in my face. But truth is, with some pretty common situations, in spite of all our research and experience sometimes there simply is nothing practical that can be

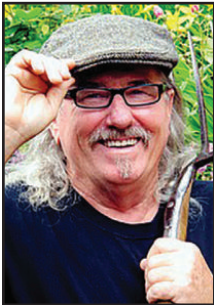
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To help me cope psychologically, decades ago I adopted a philosophy of, in order of importance, “If you can’t fix it, flee it, or fight it, flow with it.”

Fixing garden problems isn’t always easy, of course. In many garden situations it’s a matter of replacing an ailing plant with something better adapted or more pest resistant. Though frustrating and costly, this almost always solves the problem for good.

Grass dying in the shade? Plant groundcovers. Roses diseased? Plant disease-resistant varieties, or some other flowering shrub. Hate replacing annuals every season? Plant perennials. Don’t like to water? Choose drought-tolerant species. Hate pruning? Plant compact stuff. You get it.

Fixing or fleeing problems takes more planning. Getting rid of the lawn solves



FELDER RUSHING



What’s eating my kale?

the mowing chore; getting rid of trees will help grass grow better. But when it comes to persistent pests on favorite must-have plants, most controls boil down to either mechanical or chemi-

cal.

The first, at least with critters, involves exclusions such as fencing or netting, trapping, hand-picking or thumping, or interplanting with other stuff so noth-

ing is as convenient a target. Hand-pulling or hoeing weeds is a real pain, but with persistence it is pretty effective. These things have been done for many centuries, and, though not very popular, for the most part they work.

Of course, more difficult problems can be treated with pesticides. Nowadays both organic and synthetic weed killers, insecticides, fungicides, and the like can be found pretty readily, but to be honest they are usually pretty tricky.

Pesticides have to be selected and applied carefully to make sure they will do what they are supposed to do and nothing more. Collateral damage to nearby non-target plants and creatures (including pets and kids) happens easily, even with natural products. Some have to be applied multiple times or, in the case of fungicides which are preventive coatings rather than cures, ahead of time.

So, I am usually loathe to recommend sprays, dusts, granules, drenches, or other poisons, when planning ahead and fixing or fleeing

can work as well or better. Not scared to recommend them, just nervous over the potential risks.

The last approach is my favorite, at least when the problems are mostly cosmetic. It’s normal for even heathy plants to have a few irregularities, occasional leaf spots or insect infestations. Some lawn weeds, even in mid-winter, are terrific wildflowers, complete with pollinators.

Take your glasses off and a lot of problems disappear. Live with some holes in plants. Shut your mouth around clouds of whiteflies. Work around random fire ant mounds.

But in spite of searching, including at night with a flashlight, I can’t catch what’s eating my kale. Can’t fix it or fight it. Guess I’m just gonna replant, strengthen my netting, and hope for the best.

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1) Place known for development

40) Isles, to a Brit

5) It usually has busy hands

41) Camp beds

9) Raised, as a bet

42) Tootsie Pop portions

14) Diaper cream ingredient

43) Republicans, briefly

15) Move through a kiddie pool

44) Verb for Shakespeare

16) Hang in folds

45) It's slung in campaigns

17) Object of devotion

46) Pork purchase

18) Wide-mouthed pitcher

48) Breakfast meat

19) Day of old Hollywood

49) Jetted bath, e.g.

20) Three things started by half

52) Three things started by half

23) Small prop in the grass

57) Card-game expert Edmond

24) "Ciao, Brutus"

58) Go on the warpath, verbally

25) A god of war

59) Morsel for Miss Muffet

26) Before, in romantic poetry

60) Two-tone cookies

27) Bests

61) The munchies, for one

29) Investment for the golden years

62) "Anyone ___?"

32) Brown ermine

63) Neglected to

35) South American country

64) Made a right turn on horseback

36) Straddling

65) "Call of the Wild" vehicle

37) Three things started by half

DOWN

1) Middle of a three-part body measurement

2) Blast from the past

3) The animal, not the dessert

4) Word with "conveyor" or "corn"

5) One way to avoid an accident

6) Anchor rope's hole

7) As previously mentioned, in footnotes

8) Gilpin of "Frasier"

9) Milk providers

10) Investigate thoroughly

11) Like leeches

12) "Lawrence of Arabia" is one

13) Cubicle feature

21) You are here

22) Enjoy immensely

26) Puts away groceries?

27) Choppers that can't fly

28) Mine discoveries

30) Work an ax on stage

31) Dr. Zaius and kin

32) Party just for guys

33) Small band

34) Beat on a tennis court, e.g.

35) "The ___ thickens"

36) Too dry for farming

38) Bakery treat

39) Perfectly vertical

44) Deprive of power

45) Tangled into a thick mass, as hair

47) DuPont fabric

48) Door attachment

49) Cranium

50) In and of itself

51) Created a sum

52) Wearing footwear

53) Spelling of "Beverly Hills, 90210"

54) Pharmacist's item

55) Suffix with "soft" or "hard," in tech

56) Bullets, in Vegas

START WITH HALF

By Timothy E. Parker

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