

Natural ways to manage pests

By Dr CHRISTOPHER TEH

Do you have a question about plants or how to maintain your garden? Send your questions to the Plant Doctor! Email your questions to lifestyle@thestar.com.my with "Plant Doctor" in the subject field. Questions may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Dear Plant Doctor,

Q What are some of the best natural ways to manage pests without synthetic chemicals, like using beneficial insects or homemade sprays? Which plants/herbs are they suitable for? – *Ken Lee*

Beneficial insects can be used as nature's pest control. Ladybirds, praying mantises, lacewings and parasitic wasps prey on common garden pests. Attract these allies by planting marigolds, cosmos, dill and Thai basil throughout your garden.

Plant-based solutions offer effective pest management. Neem oil, mixed with water and a few drops of soap, serves as an all-purpose insecticide.

Lemongrass tea repels mosquitoes, while chilli pepper spray deters various pests. Apply these to vegetables and ornamentals, but always test a small area first.

Strategic planting enhances



Marigolds help to control soil nematodes, which are a common issue in Malaysia's tropical climate. – ANITA BOZIC/Pixabay

pest resistance. Intersperse lemongrass, pandan and citronella to naturally repel insects.

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Adapt your gardening prac-

tices to minimise pest problems. Rotate crops, water early to prevent fungal growth, and use organic mulch. Regular plant inspection is essential in tropical conditions.

Employ physical barriers for additional protection. Floating

row covers, which are lightweight, translucent fabrics draped directly over plants or plant rows, shield crops from insects, while allowing sunlight, air and water to penetrate.

These are particularly useful for protecting seedlings in the tropical climate of Malaysia.

Sticky traps also effectively capture pests; use yellow ones for flying insects and blue for thrips.

Finally, promote biodiversity. A garden with a variety of native plants, water features and undisturbed areas fosters a balanced ecosystem where natural predators thrive, aiding pest control.

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