

Garden pests: the battle against aphids, slugs and ants



African Daisy from the back step

This week has been very untypically Scottish with scorching sunshine and highs of 26 Celsius. Apart from the human enjoyment factor, the garden seems to have suddenly sprung to life, making the most of what is sure to be a very short spell of sunshine with a sudden flurry of flowers blooming and new growth on the greenery. The greenhouse too is seeing crazy temperatures and the little window opening gadget is really earning its keep, with the window open to relieve the heat by 10am most days.

With the heat comes the pest though, and we returned from a trip to New York to find that about a million aphids had moved into the greenhouse and taken up residence on our pepper plants. Cheeky blighters aren't even paying rent!

The battle commences



I had been all confident that I'd be on top of things this year, with last years mass immigration of slugs into the quadgrows, I thought I'd taken care of that this year by wrapping a line of copper tape around each water reservoir to deter

them. I have even installed some finer netting over the kale to try to defeat the cabbage moths who ate all of it last year.

Aphids were a surprise, I don't normally have an issue with these in the greenhouse, but then again, this is our first time growing peppers.

So what to do?

Well there are a couple of schools of thought on dealing with aphids, you have the old gardeners' remedies, popular amongst those who don't want to use chemical sprays in their garden (especially if they are growing food) and then you have the various chemical bug killing sprays on the market, but which is best? Do they both work? Equally?

I feel an experiment coming on.

My main concern is that if I try something out and it doesn't work, I could lose my pepper plants so I am a bit nervous, hence I decided that I'd shorten the risk by trying out the old gardeners' remedy on one plant and the commercial bug spray on another. That way if one doesn't work, I haven't lost everything.

Old gardeners' remedy

Very simply a solution of soap and water (dish soap does the job) and spray the plant, undersides of the leaves too, liberally. You may have to do this 3 or 4 times to ensure you kill all the newly hatching aphids before they have time to procreate. The recommended solution is 4 tablespoons of soap to 1 gallon of water.

So far things are looking good and both plants seem to be aphid free, but I'll keep an eye on them and hopefully by the end of next week I'll know for certain.

Video diary for this garden pests update

2016 review: Quadgrow, would I recommend it?

That's the tomato growing season come to an end here at At Bruidair and so the green house has been cleaned up for winter. Those who have been following my adventure with the new watering system may be wondering what my final thoughts were, would I recommend it, was I happy with it, are there any flaws? We'll just for you guys, here is my end of season review.

Would I recommend it? Hell yes.

I am thoroughly happy with the Quadgrow system. It did exactly

what it said on the tin. The watering was much more evenly dispersed meaning I didn't get any split tomatoes at all. In previous years this was a common occurrence. Also although I didn't notice the plants being overladen with fruit, (there had been other people claiming to have doubled their yield) I did actually get more tomatoes than previous years. The system seemed to have extended the growing season and I actually took my last tomatoes from the plants in mid October. Normally by then there nothing but green tomatoes.

Trying to think of downsides and I can't really think of any, it worked really well. There was one or two things it may be good for potential buyers to know about though:

1. the feeder mats – the plant roots grew through and around these mats meaning they are one time use only. You can buy replacements though.

2. when it came time to clean up, I was in for a surprise. Slugmageddon! Although I had no evidence at all of slugs actually causing damage, I was randomly finding slug trail and wondering why, for the first time I seemed to have slugs in the greenhouse. The explanation came when I opened things up to clean it. The underside of the pots and Quadgrow lid we're absolutely covered in slugs and slug eggs. Covered. Obviously the dark, wet environment had created a slug hotel. So next year there will be copper tape employed.

Apart from that though I'm really happy and really glad I bought these.

So yup, I would recommend them.

Did the copper tape defeat the slugs and save my strawberries?

You betcha!

So... strawberries, slugs, copper tape.

I promised you an update after I put copper tape around the raised bed with the strawberries growing in it, hoping it would deter the slugs from eating all my strawberries like in previous years.

Well I am pleased to say it definitely works. Definitely.

Last year we maybe got one bowl of strawberries for the entire season, a bit disappointment because the year before we'd gotten loads. Well this Wimbledon finals day, we had enough strawberries for 3 massive portions and we'd already had 5 or 6 portions in the weeks leading up to the final. All eaten with cream of course.

So we're looking forward to lots more strawberries but now that the slugs are under control, another pest has become more obvious... the starlings. They are eating the strawberries through my netting. Need a new plan ☐

A busy weekend in the garden. Quadgrow, tomatoes and the war on slugs.

I've had a busy weekend in the garden this week, so I thought it would be a good opportunity to give you a very quick update on how things are going with the new quadgrow system.

I installed it in the greenhouse about 3 or 4 weeks ago and planted up my baby tomato plants. What a difference in them now. They are huge and covered in little yellow flowers which means I'll have tomatoes soon.

As I had hoped, the water reservoir seems to be doing its thing, I haven't had to water the tomatoes at all since I installed things, they have been surviving/flourishing on the water and feed in the reservoir so I am very hopeful that this will mean the tomatoes are much healthier this year as they will be getting a consistent amount of water and food.

I recorded a wee video to show how well things are doing.

I also began my battle with the slugs this year. Last year, although our strawberry output was fantastic, we actually got very little of them because something else was having a good old nibble on almost every one of them.

I thought the problem had been slaters, as every strawberry was fine and plump on top, but underneath was eaten away and full of slaters, but a bit of a chat with some gardeners who are more experienced on these things felt it was more likely that slugs were eating the strawberries and the slaters were just taking advantage of the soft open fruit the slugs had left.

So, this weekend I installed some copper tape right around the

strawberry bed in the hope that it will deter slugs.

Hopefully come Wimbledon finals day I can update you on the mountain of strawberries we've had to eat.