MAINTENANCE

Natural pesticides: company proposes fighting bugs with bugs

By JOEL JOYNER

TUCSON, Ariz. — Between all the buzzing, biting, creeping, crawling and growing public scrutiny surrounding the use of pesticides, superintendents are finding themselves in greater need of alternatives. If you can fight fire with fire, why not fight bugs with bugs?

Don and Leah Cotton, owners and operators of Buglogical Control Systems, offer solutions that can eliminate your pest problems the natural way. Having supplied beneficial insects for use at universities, home gardens and Disney World, Don Cotton believes golf courses would be a natural environment for his pest-controlling products.

"For golf courses I would recommend nematodes, which would be very effective in attacking soil-dwelling insects like grubs, sod webworms and beetles, just to name a few," explains Cotton. "Beneficial nematodes aggressively pursue insects, entering through the body openings of pest and releasing a bacteria that kills the prey within 48 hours."

The bacteria is harmless to humans and other organisms, he noted, and cannot live freely in nature.

"Nematodes are already in our soils," he said, "but a problem results from using insecticides that kill everything and make the area undesirable for returning beneficial insects. The pests, on the other hand, build up a resistance to frequently sprayed insecticides, requiring the use of stronger and more environmentally harmful chemicals."

NEMATODE SOLUTION

The nematodes are microscopic, non-segmented worms that may be mixed with water and distributed by a sprayer or watering can. Ideal conditions are a moist soil and cooler temperatures found in mornings and evenings. The soil should be consistently moist for two weeks, when another application of nematodes may be necessary.

"The important part is to establish a good habitat," said Cotton. "Once an area is free of insecticide spraying and a natural balance is established, then superintendents won't have to purchase anything for pest control."

Erin O'Brien, graduate student in plant ecology at the University of Illinois in Chicago, has discovered that chemical pesticides are harmful to her research in wild flowers. "By using parasitic wasps, midge flies, and ladybugs, we've not only controlled our pest problems, but we've been able to protect our plants and further our research by not applying pesticides."

Ladybugs feeding on aphids

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