

Gotta Take the Bad With the Good

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

For the Evansville Courier and Press, August 20, 2017

A reader emailed me a picture of a caterpillar that was feeding on her milkweed. She had planted the milkweed because she had heard about a lack of monarch butterflies on social media. I identified the fuzzy orange, black and white caterpillar as the larva of the milkweed tussock moth, *Euchaetes egle*.

In continuing emails, my reader wanted to know how to get rid of this unwanted caterpillar, so that the desired caterpillars of the monarchs could feed without competition. She was not thrilled with my answer to remove them by hand; but really, what else can we do? Any pesticide that would harm the tussock moth caterpillar would also kill the monarch!

This type of dilemma has cropped up repeatedly over the years by nature enthusiasts who don't quite grasp all of the intricacies of Nature. In brief: if you are trying to attract one type of critter to your yard, you can't NOT attract other similar, but undesired, critters.

Some other examples of this include people planting large flower gardens for butterflies, but who are deathly afraid of (or allergic to) bees. Or people who put out bird feeders to attract pretty songbirds, but who want to keep out the spatzies (sparrows) and starlings. The most bizarre example of this was the person who wanted to attract deer to her yard so she could see them, but was angry because her flowers were being eaten by them!

In my Master Gardener class (starting at the end of this month), we talk about the various control options that are used in Integrated Pest Management (IPM). We look at not only how this option can be used to control a pest or protect a plant, but also in what cases it won't work, or will backfire.

For example: to protect eggplants from flea beetles, or squash plants from cucumber beetle, a floating row cover can be draped over the garden plants. The flying insects can't get to your crops now! However, neither can the honeybees, who are needed to pollinate the squash. You either need to remove the row cover, and let both the bees and the hungry beetles in, or you leave the row cover on and get no pollination.

Another example from the class: you are encouraging ladybugs to eat the aphids on your garden plants. These natural predators can keep the number of aphids down to an acceptable level. One day, you notice Japanese beetles feeding on the plants!

Ladybugs can't eat such large, heavily armored beetles. If you spray to kill the beetles, you'll kill the ladybugs; if you don't spray, your plants may be defoliated.

You can learn more about the ways to balance the good with the bad in your yard and garden at the Fall 2017 Master Gardener training. Contact my office at 812-435-5287, or at my email address, to receive a registration packet. Classes begin August 31 and September 1, so don't wait!