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Coffee grounds will deter ants

Some old household tips are coming back into use again.

Try using whole cloves in the corners of your cupboards and under the kitchen sink to keep ants away, and use bay leaves in shelves or drawers to discourage weevils. (A Kansas State University chemist is studying the compounds in bay leaves and cucumber skins that actively repel roaches.)

Sprinkle dried coffee grounds around the outside of your kitchen door to deter ants.

Mothballs are useful in more places than your blanket or sweater storage, but be careful, too many fumes from them are unhealthy for you too. Nevertheless, a few mothballs tied in cheesecloth and tacked to your screen door may keep flies out of the house.

And a few mothballs in the corner top shelves of your garage or storage shed will discourage wasps from building their nests.

Last year we had some wasps in the fireplace so I put a few mothballs in the empty grate this summer.

Nothing seemed to discourage whatever is eating the newest green shoots and leaves on our fruit trees (I've been told it's probably a rock squirrel).

Tried mothballs

Whatever it is, it wouldn't take any of the baits we tried in the Have-a-heart trap.

In desperation, I tied mothballs in the legs of old hose and wrapped the tree trunks.

It seemed to protect the trees

very well until the heat evaporated all the mothballs and they had to be replenished. Mothballs or flakes will also keep a cat from digging in your favorite flowers.

Other deterrents I have read of are sprinkling blood meal around plants; making a blender mix of garlic, hot pepper, water, and a drop of detergent to make it cling and spraying plants. Cigar butts soaked in water were suggested — certainly sounds repellant!

While we're gardening, put used coffee grounds on roses, azaleas or other acid-loving plants.

Banana skins either cut up or dug in around roses (I like to put them through the blender too — instant liquid fertilizer that is high in potassium — we have had huge roses after feeding them "banana splits").

For a bumper crop of peppers, spray at blossom time with one teaspoon of epsom salts per pint of water. Put your young melons and cantalopes on top of tin cans to ripen faster and protect from rot. Before getting out more insecticide, give the cactus wrens, praying mantis, ladybugs, toads, lizards, lacewings and other friends a chance to clear away the pests such as aphids, beetles, caterpillars and others.

Marigold's odor is said to repel rabbits, but only fine chicken wire seems to stop our rabbits from eating everything in sight.

Friday night our barking dog led us to the back porch where a 3- to 4-inch iridescent blue-green

winged beetle and a tarantula about the same size were battling.

Eventually, the tarantula lost and the beetle kept trying to drag it backwards up the wall, but couldn't handle that much weight and would tumble down again. The next morning both were gone, somehow.

(Note: Ed said the "beetle" was not that big — perhaps it was a tarantula hawk? There are several species of these large, solitary wasps, all a striking blue-black metallic color. The wasp's sting paralyzes the spider, which is then dragged into a hole and an egg laid upon it so that the wasp larva will have instant food available.)

The storm and wind Aug. 8 brought down the top 21 feet of our extra-tall saguaro — what is left is still as tall as the surrounding saguaro (over 20 feet). There had been a beehive in the top part which blew down and we had a swarm of very angry bees for a few days.

Other backyard happenings: we have a fierce quail that we have watched chase off a large roadrunner and a red racer. That batch of quail babies should have a good chance to survive to adulthood.

On Aug. 18 I saw two saguaro blooming; and that same afternoon a pair of quail brought their eight fluffy new chicks to the water dish. Spring again after all the rain! When is the latest you have seen quail babies and saguaro blooms at the same time?

— Jo Walker