



from the ground up

Invasion of the Rosebud Snatchers

by:
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Okay, I confess. For Lent, I promised to abstain from evil garden pesticides, and faithfully kept my organic vow throughout the Lenten season. I am a big believer in organic garden practices, and continually strive to be a pesticide-free gardener. But...the day after Easter, all bets were off. The garden was about to become blissfully, certifiably, 100% toxic.

Why? Unbeknownst to us, our garden had been chosen as the official site of the 2009 American Aphid Society National Convention. This is one bunch of rowdy convention-goers you don't want. It's an unpleasant surprise, akin to learning that your next door neighbor is hosting the Woodstock festival. You know there will be a lot of uninvited guests 'using' your shrubs for various seedy, and quite likely illegal purposes. You also know that nothing good can possibly come from teeming throngs of sweaty, unwashed youngsters cavorting through your bushes.

This spring promised to be one of the most beautiful garden seasons on record. Delighted, I discovered that my 'New Dawn' rose was covered with thousands of large pink buds, guaranteeing a spectacular show just in time for my lovely daughter's big wedding. But on closer inspection, the tender rose buds were completely encrusted with appallingly thirsty, sap-sucking creatures. It was the Bubonic Plague of Aphids. Millions, billions, gazillions of aphids. The entire Aphid Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines had convened on my precious roses. Hands down, this green gathering was the largest in the country. I counted 2 million, zillion aphids on one bush alone.

So much for my pacifism. This meant war. Breaking land speed records, I arrived at the neighborhood organic garden supply store and explained my dilemma to the clerk. Furtively, he looked around, then grabbed me by the shoulders and pulled me into the corner. "Look," he says, "I am as green as the next person, but if your daughter's getting married in two weeks, and you have that many aphids, you have no choice but to get out the heavy artillery." He handed me a gi-

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ant bottle of something nasty, embellished with **DANGER: POISON** warning signs and skull & crossbones in bold print and sent me home out the back door. "That'll kill the little beasties!" He yelled, shaking his fist, as I careened out of the parking lot.

While I occasionally use fungicides, I remain wary of insecticides, eschewing them as much as possible because of my life-long devotion to butterflies, bees, and other delicate beneficial insects. It's powerful poison, for heaven's sake, and passersby love to bury their noses in the fragrant blooms along our sidewalk. My previous experience with insecticide use had sadly culminated in the death of a newborn baby cardinal, still sitting in part of its little eggshell in the nest. Hidden in a massive climbing rose, I had accidentally sprayed the hapless creature. This time, I told myself, I would be careful to look before I sprayed. Driving down the road, I could smell the toxicity through the bottle, and knew it would kill everything in sight, including me if I breathed much more of the stuff. I rolled down the window and hung my head out like a dog.

However, highly motivated by the thoughts of pending nuptials and out-of-town guests, I donned the safety "cos-

tume," complete with snazzy blue respirator snugly strapped around my head. Wearing the garish garb, I always feel a bit like a circus clown. Mental note: Must design more stylish ladies' garden attire. Out I went, armed and ready with my trusty cannon, a 5-gallon super-duper bad boy power sprayer with shiny brass trigger and turbo-nozzle, guaranteed to send any offending critter, at warp-speed, to bug heaven. This year's big aphid convention was about to come to a rousing finale, with my compliments.

Before firing my first shot, I looked carefully into the big rambling rose, and sure enough, the mama cardinal had again built her nest in the very same spot, in the very same bush. I was relieved to know that at least she had survived my carelessness.

Avoiding that area, I leveled my high pressure spray trigger at the horde of aphids and yelled at the top of my lungs: "Prepare to die, you savage little sap-sucking rose wreckers! Meet your Maker, you fat, free-loading fiends!" I blasted them to kingdom come, and then squirted a little extra for good measure, relishing every poison drop I unloaded on the unsuspecting party-goers. And next year, I suggest you take your convention elsewhere.

