



Stink Bugs—Botanical Control Formulations

Stink bugs are true bugs, family Pentatomidae of the Order Hemiptera, that affect many host plants. One such is *Nezara viridula*, the southern green stink bug. These bugs leave yellow, calloused blotches on tomatoes and cause them to have an off-flavor. Stink bugs come in many sizes and shapes. Many true bugs are pests, but some are quite beneficial. This causes confusion because some of the predators are shaped or pigmented in similar configurations as pests. The brown stink bug, brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB), and spined soldier bug are all very similar to the untrained eye. All three are brown, but there are subtle identifying differences. The BMSB has distinct triangular shapes on either side of its abdomen and lacks shoulder spikes. Brown stink bugs have shoulder spikes like spined soldier bugs but lack the black crenelation that both the BMSB and spined soldier bugs have. Spined soldier bugs also have a black stripe at the end of their wings that looks almost like a tail.



Stink bugs cause injury to fruits, seeds, and leaves. They can also serve as vectors for disease. This Orsilichedes is causing leaf curl damage on the wild grape it is feeding upon. Photo: Justin Duncan, NCAT

Mint (*Mentha*): Menthol and Menthone

Stink bugs don't like mint (Bunn, 2014). They generally shy away from strong-smelling plants. This may be because they rely on their own strong smell for defense and signaling to females (Aldrich et al., 1987). Mint oil can be used to deter stink bug pests on vegetables. Mint oil has low phytotoxicity (Papatsakona et al., 2013).

Garlic (*Allium sativum*): Allicin

Garlic is another strongly scented herb that can be used to deter stink bugs. Freshly blended and strained cloves should be sprayed onto affected plants, ensuring that the undersides of the leaves are thoroughly covered. Three large crushed or blended cloves added to a liter of water in a spray bottle and applied every few days should deter stink bugs from bothering crops like tomatoes.

Lemon Verbena (*Aloysia*): Citronellal and Sabinene

Essential oils of *Aloysia*, or lemon verbena, have been found to be effective in killing eggs and nymphs of stink bugs. *Aloysia* has two species whose essential oils are effective against stink bugs: *Aloysia polystachya* and *A. citriodora*. *A. polystachya* was more than twice as effective as *A. citriodora*, but both were highly effective. Just 7 ml of *A. polystachya* essential oil (carvone being the pesticidal compound) per liter of water is effective, while it takes about 16 ml/L of *A. citriodora* essential oil, which is made up mostly of two different chemical compounds: citronellal and sabinene (Werdin-Gonzalez et al., 2010).

Thyme (*Thymus*): Thymol

Thyme has been found to be lethal to eggs, nymphs, and adult stink bugs. It is both a contact poison to them and a fumigant and repellent. The trick is the concentration. It takes a great deal of thymol to kill an adult green stink bug (*Nezara*) versus a nymph, so

it is best to spray for nymphs for efficiency's sake but even better to use it as a repellent. The rates for the essential oil use for repellency is 20ml/L for nymphs and 40ml/L for adults, killing nymphs is 22ml/L but killing adults takes an excessive 180ml/L (Gonzalez et al., 2010). Alternatively, a couple handfuls of thyme fresh from the garden could be run through a blender with water, strained and sprayed using a spray bottle.

Oregano (Origanum): Cymene and Terpinene

Oregano essential oil was also found to be effective at repelling and killing stink bug eggs, nymphs, and adults, although not at the potency of its cousin, thyme. Using oregano essential oil requires about double the amount of oil to do the same job as thyme essential oil (Werdin-Gonzalez et al., 2010). One reason may be that in thyme essential oil, thymol constitutes about half of the total composite, while oregano is more fractionated. Often, there are several different essential oils that can come from one plant. Some of them will be more effective at killing or repelling pests than others. This explains why oregano oil is not as effective as thyme, which has a higher concentration (larger fraction) of a potent chemical constituent (i.e., thymol).



Orsilichedes nymphs feeding upon Vitis mustangensis leaves in San Antonio, Texas.
Photo: Justin Duncan, NCAT

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Companion Planting & Botanical Pesticides: Concepts & Resources

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Published July 2010
Updated April 2016
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Certain plants can benefit others when planted in close proximity or used as botanical pesticides. This publication discusses the scientific and traditional basis for companion planting practices including trap cropping, weed suppression, physical spatial interactions, and other relationships. It provides a companion planting chart for common herbs, vegetables, and flowers, as well as a listing of literature resources. An appendix provides information on the Three Sisters, a traditional Native American companion planting practice.

Traditional Companion Planting

Companion planting can be divided into two categories: **repellent** and **attractant**. Repellent companion planting uses plants that emit scents or produce substances that repel pests. Attractant companion planting uses plants that attract pests away from the main crop. The concept embraces a number of strategies that increase the biodiversity of agroecosystems (Gunningham, 1996).

Companion planting is thought of as a traditional practice. However, here the term is applied in its broader sense to include applications to commercial horticultural and agronomic crops. ATTRA has several publications, including *Principles and Practices of Companion Planting*, that provide additional information on large-scale applications.

Although companion planting has a long history, the mechanisms of beneficial plant interactions have not always been well understood. Traditional recommendations (see Table 1) used by gardeners have evolved from an increasing combination of historical observations, horticultural science, and a few experimental studies. For example, some of the recommendations for companion planting, made around the middle of the 20th century, were based on the results of massive cross-pollination tests (Dillbeck and Geigy, 1965).

A long history of companion planting is using botanical pesticides. Companion planting is a pest management approach, while botanical sprays are more chemical. Both rely on phytochemicals in the host plant being different from the companion plants, or the way being used. One consideration for using botanical sprays that is different from using companion planting is that the botanical spray may affect the host plant's development (Taran et al., 2011). The same can be said of synthetic pesticides (Opere et al., 2006).

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ATTRA has a database of low-risk pesticides, including some botanicals, at <https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/biorationals>. To learn more, consult the ATTRA publication *Companion Planting & Botanical Pesticides: Concepts & Resources*.

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2013-51106-20970.

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By Justin Duncan, NCAT Agriculture Specialist • Published Sept. 2016 ©NCAT
IP528 • Slot 554



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