

GARDEN PLOTS: 5 Ws and an H for assessing the garden

- By RHONDA NOWAK for the Rogue Valley Times

- 4 hrs ago

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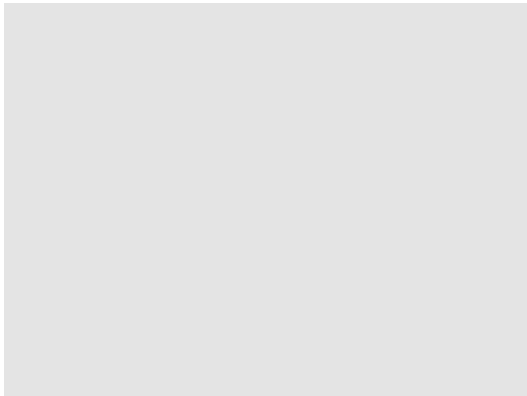
What looks like vomit around the author's rosebushes is actually a beneficial slime mold that helps decompose organic matter. It's caused by warm weather and excess water.

Photo by Rhonda Nowak

When I was in journalism school in the late 1980s, I learned to approach every article I wrote with 5 Ws and an H in mind: who, what, when, where, why and how. This was a useful framework to ensure I included important information.

Later when I switched to teaching language arts, I taught my students to use the 5 Ws and an H when identifying key information in their reading material and developing outlines for their writing. I still use this framework in the writing classes I teach at Rogue Community College.

Now that hot summer temperatures have settled over the Rogue Valley, I've developed a morning gardening routine that includes watering, weeding, pruning, harvesting and assessing. I have found the same 5 Ws and H are helpful to consider when I assess how the plants in my garden are growing and producing. Here are a couple of examples:



Holes in the author's Swiss chard indicate a chewing insect has had a fine meal. Using the 5 Ws and an H to assess your garden provides a useful framework to consider important information.
Photo by Rhonda Nowak

Who (or which plants)? Swiss chard

Where? In the hoop house

What? Large holes bitten in the leaves

When? Mostly appear overnight^[SEP]

Why? Some chewing insect

How (to resolve)? Identify pest and reduce population

Who (or which plants)? Rose garden

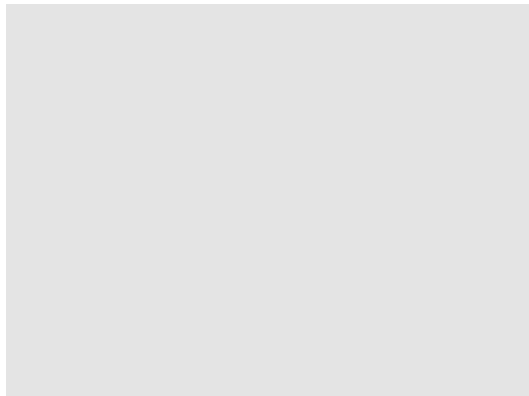
Where? On the mulch within the root zone of some of the rosebushes

What? Some type of fungus?

When? Summertime after supplemental watering

Why? Possibly overwatering?

How (to resolve)? Identify fungus, stop supplemental watering and reassess



Where there is one armyworm visible, there is usually an entire platoon of armyworms waiting until dark for an ambush on garden plants. These small worms chew large holes in its favorite foliage and can even skeletonize the entire plant.

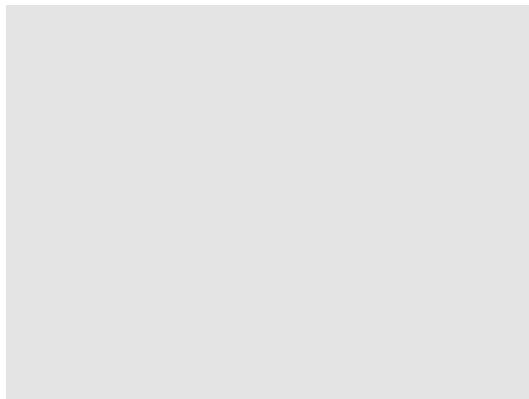
Photo by Rhonda Nowak

Pinpointing which particular plants to assess, where they are located and what the issue is helps me to narrow my focus so I don't feel overwhelmed. This is a common feeling when summer kicks in and the garden becomes a bit (or a lot) unruly with unwelcome guests. Determining when the issue occurs/occurred is useful when trying to identify patterns. Answering why the issue is

occurring requires me to hypothesize possible causes, and considering how to resolve the issue usually necessitates some research and experimentation.

Let's go back to my Swiss cheese Swiss chard in the hoop house. I hypothesized that some nocturnal chewing insect is creating large holes in the leaves. I wanted to identify the specific pest so I know how to effectively reduce the population. I could go out to the hoop house at night with a flashlight and see if I could catch the pesky so-and-sos in the act. I could also set out some "beer traps" in case the insect is one of several garden insect pests that are attracted to brewing yeast.

In the meantime, I researched the most common chewing insects on Swiss chard and learned they include worms (armyworms, cabbageworms, cutworms), beetles (cucumber beetles, flea beetles) and slugs. By viewing pictures of leaf damage caused by each of these insects, I narrowed down the culprit to some sort of worm (holes made by beetles are usually smaller and I haven't seen any slug trails). Sure enough, I found a tiny worm already feeding on the Swiss chard around dusk that I've identified as a type of armyworm.



Rhonda Nowak

Where there is one armyworm, there is a high probability that a whole platoon is waiting until dark for an ambush. I found a helpful website (<https://drecampbell.com/armyworm-natural-ways-to-get-rid-of-them/>) that

provides several ways to reduce the population of armyworms, including picking them off the foliage, applying neem oil and/or insecticidal soap, and introducing predatory wasps, nematodes or beneficial insects. Now that I'm well informed, I can choose one or more of these strategies and assess for effectiveness.

As for the possible fungus growing around my rosebushes, I took a picture of it and did some research on the web for a fungus that looks like vomit. It turns out that it's not a fungus but a type of slime mold (*Fuligo septica*) that, as I suspected, occurs in warm weather in overwatered areas. The good news is that slime mold is actually beneficial to plants because it helps to break down organic material and releases nutrients that plants can access.

All I need to do is stop the supplemental watering around my rosebushes. In fact, removing the slime mold after it dries will release spores, which can be an allergen (although not toxic) to humans and pets.

Try using the 5 Ws and an H for assessing your garden this summer. You may be pleasantly surprised by all the things you learn.

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