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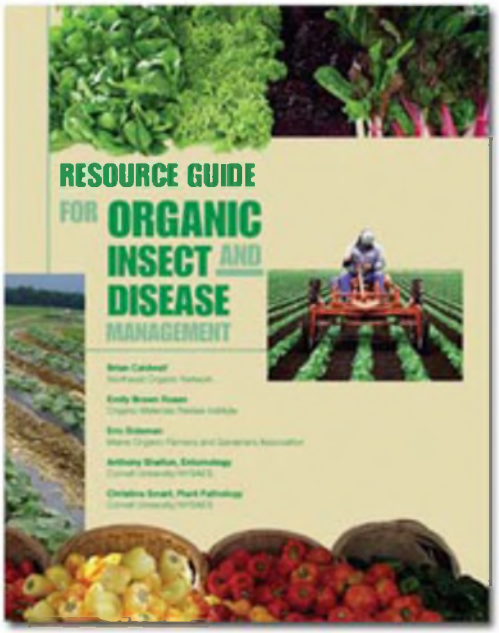

Cornell publishes new guide for organic farmers

ITHACA, N.Y. — Are you an organic grower faced with spots on your tomatoes, holes in your cabbage, and wilt in your pumpkin vines? Do you wonder whether your garden suffers from canker, flea beetles, or leaf spot? Find out what causes the damage and how to manage it in a new guidebook for organic growers — *Resource Guide for Organic Insect and Disease Management* — just released by Cornell University. An on-line version, with links to printable PDF files, is available at <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/pp/resourceguide/>

"As a former extension person, I can tell you this is the type of information we have needed for years in order to be better able to advise organic farmers," says Brian Caldwell, lead author, and Cornell researcher on a large organic farming systems study. Caldwell participated in the project under the auspices of Cornell and the Northeast Organic Network (NEON).

"Organic growers sometimes face significant problems controlling insects and diseases in their crops," says co-author Tony Shelton, Cornell University professor of entomology, one of the guide's five authors. "Our purpose was to compile accurate information based on published research to help growers identify and deal with these problems."

The number of farmers and the acreage dedicated to organic farming has been steadily increasing over the last 10 years, as organic food sales have increased approximately 20 percent annually. "Organic producers are still only two percent of the overall food production system, but it is important that Cornell research and extension efforts address their needs," says Christine D. Smart, assistant professor of plant pathology at Cornell, another one of the guide's co-authors.

When their crops are at risk, organic growers are only allowed to use those pesticides that have been approved by the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP). This essentially means that the pesticide must be a natural substance, or a synthetic substance that is included in the NOP.
"Both types of pesticides have risks," says Shelton. "What is unique about this guide is that we provide comprehensive assessments of the environmental and human health risks of the pesticides most commonly used in organic production."

The 169-page, soft-cover book is divided into three sections. The first section gives detailed crop management practices for five of the most important vegetable groups: lettuce, sweet corn, brassicas (cabbages and related crops), cucurbits (squash and its relatives) and solanaceous (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and eggplant). The focus is on what are called "preventative pest management" practices that lessen the likelihood of pest attack. Dozens of useful color pictures help growers identify insect and disease problems in these crops.

The second section provides a comprehensive assessment of 13 of the most commonly used pesticides in

organic production, with descriptions based on their origin and how they work, the types of pests they control, and their effects on the environment and human health.

The last section describes options that growers can use for preventive management, including growing plants that are pest-resistant, or planting crops in ways that reduce the risk of pest attack.
The other two authors are Emily Brown Rosen, consultant and former policy director for the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI), and Eric Sideman, the director of technical services for the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). Both played a key role in shaping the project and contributing valuable and practical information, according to Shelton.

The guide is published by the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) at Cornell University.

A limited number of copies are available from the NYSAES online bookstore for $15 + shipping

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Related World Wide Web sites:

http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/pp/resourceguide/

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