



Wilson's Nursery



Connie's Corner

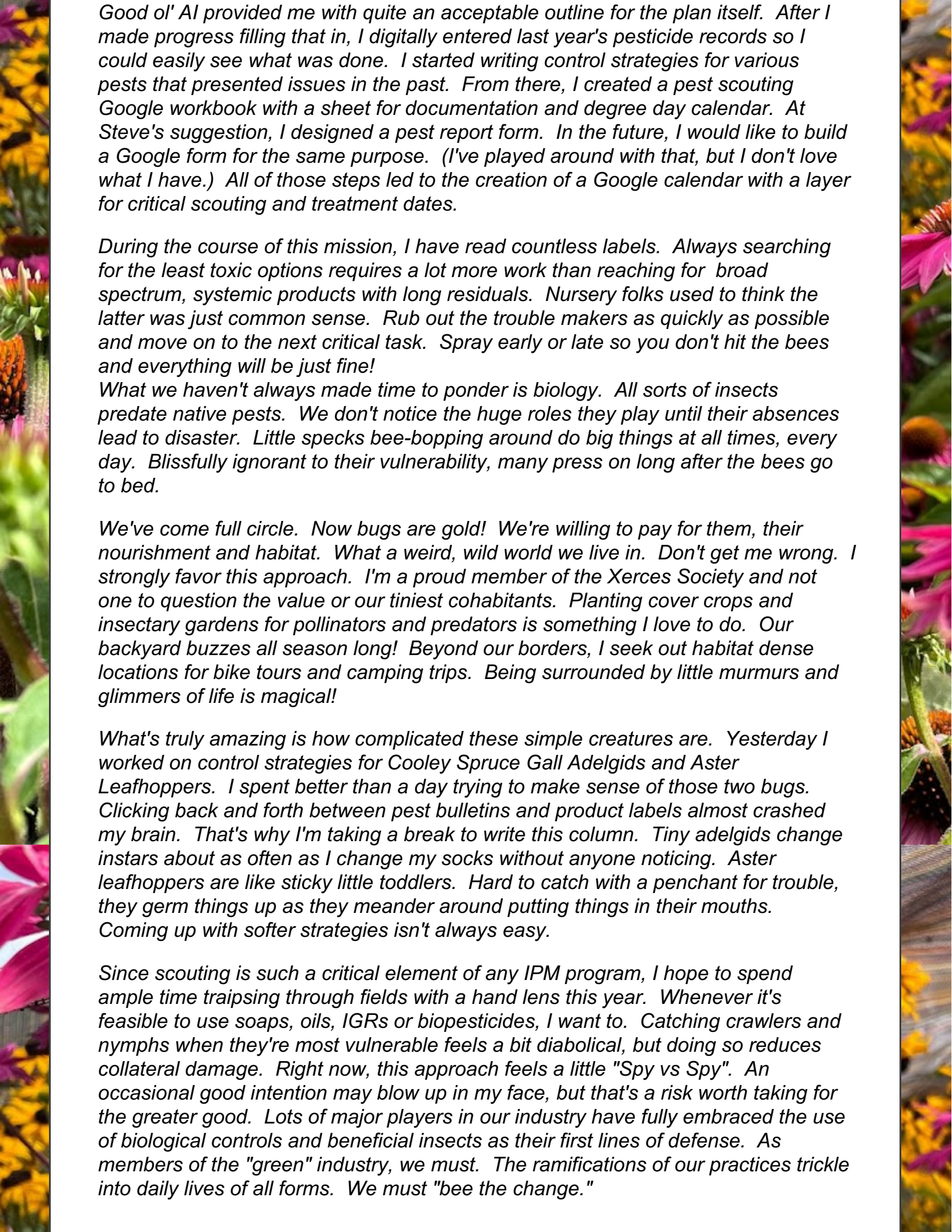
Always Somethin' Buggin'

by Connie Kratzke

Since I was a little girl insects have fascinated me. Mom and I raised many Monarchs, mesmerized by their metamorphosis. Countless Woolly Bears crossed the road with my assistance. Numerous Dragon Flies used me as a landing pad. No aversion to Arachnids ever stopped me from inspecting their intricate webs. I was terrified of stinging insects for a while, but with good reason. Adventurous and clumsy, I was not naive to the impacts of their dissuasive techniques. That fear molted into respect as I grew older.

Insects only do what they must. They aren't burdened by deep thoughts or lofty goals. Going about their very specific daily business, they are oblivious to the big picture. Their tiny lives directly impact the survival of entire species, but that's none of their concern. Monarchs don't know why they're Snowbirds. Leafhoppers don't intentionally windsurf to Minnesota. Completely unaware of their powers, some pollinate and others decimate. Survival until procreation is the only goal.

The mission of my focus during the last few weeks has been creating a multi-faceted, IPM plan. Now, I've never done that before, but I'm doing the hell out of it!



Good ol' AI provided me with quite an acceptable outline for the plan itself. After I made progress filling that in, I digitally entered last year's pesticide records so I could easily see what was done. I started writing control strategies for various pests that presented issues in the past. From there, I created a pest scouting Google workbook with a sheet for documentation and degree day calendar. At Steve's suggestion, I designed a pest report form. In the future, I would like to build a Google form for the same purpose. (I've played around with that, but I don't love what I have.) All of those steps led to the creation of a Google calendar with a layer for critical scouting and treatment dates.

During the course of this mission, I have read countless labels. Always searching for the least toxic options requires a lot more work than reaching for broad spectrum, systemic products with long residuals. Nursery folks used to think the latter was just common sense. Rub out the trouble makers as quickly as possible and move on to the next critical task. Spray early or late so you don't hit the bees and everything will be just fine!

What we haven't always made time to ponder is biology. All sorts of insects predate native pests. We don't notice the huge roles they play until their absences lead to disaster. Little specks bee-bopping around do big things at all times, every day. Blissfully ignorant to their vulnerability, many press on long after the bees go to bed.

We've come full circle. Now bugs are gold! We're willing to pay for them, their nourishment and habitat. What a weird, wild world we live in. Don't get me wrong. I strongly favor this approach. I'm a proud member of the Xerces Society and not one to question the value of our tiniest cohabitants. Planting cover crops and insectary gardens for pollinators and predators is something I love to do. Our backyard buzzes all season long! Beyond our borders, I seek out habitat dense locations for bike tours and camping trips. Being surrounded by little murmurs and glimmers of life is magical!

What's truly amazing is how complicated these simple creatures are. Yesterday I worked on control strategies for Cooley Spruce Gall Adelgids and Aster Leafhoppers. I spent better than a day trying to make sense of those two bugs. Clicking back and forth between pest bulletins and product labels almost crashed my brain. That's why I'm taking a break to write this column. Tiny adelgids change instars about as often as I change my socks without anyone noticing. Aster leafhoppers are like sticky little toddlers. Hard to catch with a penchant for trouble, they germ things up as they meander around putting things in their mouths. Coming up with softer strategies isn't always easy.

Since scouting is such a critical element of any IPM program, I hope to spend ample time traipsing through fields with a hand lens this year. Whenever it's feasible to use soaps, oils, IGRs or biopesticides, I want to. Catching crawlers and nymphs when they're most vulnerable feels a bit diabolical, but doing so reduces collateral damage. Right now, this approach feels a little "Spy vs Spy". An occasional good intention may blow up in my face, but that's a risk worth taking for the greater good. Lots of major players in our industry have fully embraced the use of biological controls and beneficial insects as their first lines of defense. As members of the "green" industry, we must. The ramifications of our practices trickle into daily lives of all forms. We must "bee the change."



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