

Back in 2022 I basically, actually definitely, had a pest-based disaster of a year. From Aphids in the winter to squash bugs into the fall I will talk about the pest troubles I had, and how I, at least tried, to remediate them.

Aphids In Winter

In the fall of 2021 I took some successful pepper plants indoors for overwintering, but all I did was prune them back and dig them up. The fatal mistake in this was not cleaning all the dirt off of the roots, and therefore washing away any pests (aphids) in the soil. I did not realize this disastrous mistake until February. The small baby plants did not stand a chance against the aphids, which frankly just ate most of their little stems away. To make matters worse this was the first, and last, year I tried taking plant pre-orders for my business! It took a few weeks of one day having a healthy cell of seedlings, to the next having nothing in said cell, for me to realize what was going on. I desperately tried using pesticides, Seven and Neem (Neem was the only one that kinda worked), but it was no use in the end. Prevention works better than pesticides in this case, so nowadays I never bring outside plants into the growroom, and clean all trays that still have dirt on them before using them indoors. Since then I have also learned yellow sticky traps in the growroom work wonders against fungus gnats.

Squash Problems

Despite that “minor” setback I continued planting, and before long I had squash in the ground, and then it just died. So I replanted it, and those died. Eventually I realized squash vine borers, and squash bugs, were the main culprits. Although cucumber beetles may have added to the problem for sure. I planted a fall crop of squash, and desperately protected these with neem oil and mint. It barely worked, but in the end I went on a vacation that subsequently left the squash to fend for themselves. I came back to dead plants. However, in the end I harvested a single patty pan squash! In response to this issue I went through in winter and really aggressively disturbed where I suspected the pests were hibernating in the garden. Come next spring/summer I grew under row cover for a few months. My strategy now is to grow under cover during late spring/ early summer, and use pesticides if necessary. Thankfully I have mostly only had to spray for cucumber beetles since, which I will talk about now.

Along With Cucumbers

The cucumbers were very similar to the squash, except the cucumber beetles didn't kill the plants as quickly. I had no clue what a cucumber beetle was then, so I did nothing but watch in frustration. I only harvested one cucumber that year! In the following winter I learned about cucumber beetles, and a nitrogen deficiency along the cucumber trellis. Now the hard thing about handling cucumber beetles for me is that I grow on permanent trellises, meaning insect netting is not logical. So I have struggled since, but have got more cucumbers thankfully. My plan for this upcoming season is to spray the cucumber beetles at first sight, hopefully ending the breeding cycle for the year right then and there. I know it won't be perfect, but it will be better than the 2024 season where I completely avoided pesticide use until the problem was out of control. In the end this led to more usage of pesticides than if I had just used a little early on.

I hope you enjoyed this short story, and rest assured I found a way to have a half-decent season in the end!