

## Features

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# Mythbusting: Helping Consumers Sort Fact From Fiction

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**Myth 1:** Putting chewing gum in a hole, preferably Juicy Fruit, will entice moles, voles, and groundhogs to eat it and clog up their intestines, eventually killing them.

**Legit Advice:** There are a number of products, including traps for voles, moles and groundhogs. They're spring-loaded, pushed into a tunnel and the simple trap snaps. These are easy for the homeowner to operate and they're reusable. I never recommend poisons because they can get into the food chain, nor do I recommend glue traps because they're just cruel. There are Havahart traps for larger pests. It's never recommended to re-locate animals, according to wildlife experts.



**Myth 2:** Then there are the mosquito-repellent plants. There was a rush on lemongrass last year in advance of the onslaught of mosquitoes. Citronella plants were a hot item, too. Well, unless you walk around, crushing the leaves the entire time you were outside, the local garden center appreciated the business. Depending on where you live, many mosquitoes are carrying West

Nile disease or Zika virus. These are serious diseases that can cause illness or worse, so mosquito control is no joke.

**Legit Advice:** Carry a variety of insect sprays for humans, preferably with DEET, which is highly recommended against mosquitoes. Some customers may prefer botanical sprays, which can still be somewhat effective and it may close the sale for you. Tiki torches around the outside of the outdoor area where people will congregate will also be helpful, but must be used in combination with the sprays. If you have a section of outdoor canopies that include netting, you have hit the trifecta and could combine all three into a safe outdoor space.

**Myth 3:** A combination of Dawn dish soap (buy some stock), Heinz 57 vinegar and Epsom salts makes a great

weed killer. Instead, this combo is great for killing beneficial organisms. The group that uses this thinks they're being environmentally safe and organic. You'll see it on Facebook with the headline "Never Buy Round-Up Again!"

**Legit Advice:** You have to explain to people that Heinz 57 is only 5% acetic vinegar and may knock down some weeds, but the tough ones will be back with a vengeance. Horticultural vinegar is 20% acetic acid and I've seen it as high as 30% acetic acid. It'll kill weeds, usually on the first try. Just caution them to use eye protection, which they should be wearing if using the other stuff, too. Maybe have some eye protectors in the pesticide section and stress to always follow the label for application. There are other organic herbicides as well that can be promoted.

**Myth 4:** Using PAM vegetable spray works for scale on your plants is another myth. I've checked with Con Agra and they said PAM is only for cooking vegetables and not spraying on plants.

**Legit Advice:** Horticultural oil works great on insects in and out of the home as long as it's on the label. Ask the customer what insect is on the plant and have them look to see if the plant is on the label. If it's on the label, you've made a sale. If they want to keep their houseplants happy and healthy, a little TLC with a washcloth and some water works wonders, and they can talk to their plant while wiping it down.

**Myth 5:** There's the home gardener that heard if you add Epsom salts to your tomatoes, that will make a meatier product that's resistant to blossom end rot.

**Legit Advice:** Meatier tomatoes will depend on the variety of tomato, not what Epsom salts will add to the soil. Blossom end rot can be caused by a lack of calcium or irregular watering, which doesn't allow for the complete uptake of calcium or too much nitrogen fertilizer. The easy sale is going to be a soil test kit that either you or the homeowner can perform and get the result and the proper product for that perfect tomato.

**Myth 6:** The best ways to repel deer include spraying human urine around the perimeter of your property. The only way to do that is to either collect gallons of it (ewww) or have the man of the house gingerly walk around the property. The neighbors could object and call the police. An actual method is to use coyote urine since they're a predator of deer. Unfortunately, the scent also lets the coyote member of the opposite sex know that there's a female waiting for a date and you may not want to attract coyotes to your property, especially if you have small animals. Lastly is the hanging of Irish Spring soap (because no other will do) off your trees and shrubs, giving you some lovely suds when it rains.

**Legit Advice:** To prevent getting family members arrested there are a number of repellent products on the market, many of them with different modes of action. I like to suggest to homeowners to alternate the repellents with one that are taste-sensitive to ones that are smell-sensitive. Not only are there liquid repellents, but granular ones as well. Many of them also work on rabbits. You should have a variety in your store so shoppers can have a choice. There are also physical barriers, such as strong deer netting, chicken wire for the bunnies, regular fencing or any combination of the above.

**Myth 7:** In my neck of the woods, the invasion of the Spotted Lantern Fly (SLF) had everyone scrambling to defeat the horde. People were putting out bowls of Pine Sol (because who knew that was an insecticide?) with vinegar, sugar, water and, of course, Epsom salts to attract the leafhopper. And they did catch a few, but more importantly they caught honeybees, a few flies and sundry other insects. But some people can't leave well enough alone and they started spraying their plants indiscriminately as soon as they saw an SLF and pretty much destroyed their plants and they blamed the pest.

**Legit Advice:** For now in our arsenal we have insecticidal soap, Neem oil and sprays that contain Deltamethrin to combat SLF. They should be applied according to the label and not more often. Circle traps are very effective in catching the nymphs in their crawler stages and are relatively easy to make for the homeowner. It would be an ideal class to have early in the spring and get those customers into the seats. We're seeing that sticky tape is catching

nymphs, but unfortunately, catching birds, butterflies and hummingbirds, so that would only be useful under the circle traps. But one of the most effective and cheapest ways to kill SLF is the fly swatter. This past fall, you couldn't buy a fly swatter anywhere. The dollar stores were shaking their heads thinking they should have stocked up on them.

So now you have your arsenal against at least some of the myths of the Internet. **GP**

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