Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Pack 12, Item 10

Type: Script

Date

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**Preventing bird damage in garden crops**

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Information on this subject area was requested by DCFRN participants in Argentina, Colombia, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ghana, India, Liberia, Mexico, Pakistan, Palau, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Taiwan (Republic of China), Tanzania, and Trinidad.

Presenter: George Atkins

Interviewer: Magdalena Burgess, DCFRN Researcher/Scriptwriter

Interviewee: Hartley Joseph, a farmer in St. Lucia, West Indies

**Special note**

Before using the information in this item, please read the note at the end.

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a world-wide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, Massey Ferguson, and the University of Guelph.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to increase food supplies for your family, or to sell—ways that other farmers have used successfully.

Today we have more on the subject of birds that destroy your garden crops. Here's George Atkins.

**ATKINS:** Hartley Joseph is a farmer in the island country of St. Lucia in the Caribbean. Not long ago, when Magdalena Burgess was on his farm, she noticed several old shirts hanging from a tree in his garden and from a stake stuck in the ground in the garden. She also noticed that he had a fine crop of beautiful tomatoes. Hartley told her that the shirts were there to scare birds away from his ripening tomatoes.

**JOSEPH:** When they see the shirts, they think it's somebody thereand then they fly away.

**BURGESS:** So you just took a shirt ...

**JOSEPH:** … and hung it up—and it's flagging around.

**BURGESS:** So it's just hung on a stick?

**JOSEPH:** That's right—and there's another one there—andanother one over there.

**BURGESS:** That's a good idea. So you just use old shirts.

**JOSEPH:** Yes, old shirts hanging around. But they should be indifferent colours, not just one colour, and they should be flagging and upright.

**ATKINS:** And how does Hartley Joseph hang up these old shirts so they'll look like people moving around in his garden? Well, he just gets a straight stick about half a metre (18 inches) long, and a piece of strong string a little longer than that. He ties one end of the string to the middle of the stick so when he holds the other end of the string, the stick will hang there in a horizontal position.

Hartley's next step in putting up his bird scarer is to tie the loose end of the string to the branch of a tree about 2 metres (6 or 7 feet) above the ground. He then puts an old shirt on the stick so it hangs on it the same way it would hang if he put it over his own shoulders. With it hanging on the stick this way, he then buttons up or fastens the front of the shirt.

Now you can see that when the shirt is hanging there like that in the tree, it doesn't take much of a breeze for that shirt to start moving around. In fact, if it happened to be a windy day, the shirt would blow around a lot—like a flag would blow in the wind. That's why Hartley talked about the shirt "flagging around."

By the way, when he ties up one of these bird scarers in a tree, he always makes sure there are no branches close by for the shirt to get caught in. It just has to hang free so it can move around by itself when the wind blows.

Another way Hartley hangs up a bird scarer is by tying the string to the end of a long stick or pole he puts up in the middle of his garden. It has to be slanting a little so the shirt will hang free from the top.

There's another way he could do it, of course. He could put up two tall poles, one on each side of the garden, stretch a long string between them and then tie the strings of one or more of these hanging shirts to it.

Now we must remember, of course, that Hartley Joseph lives in an island country where warm winds are almost always blowing to keep his bird scarers moving. In other countries, some people make dummies that look like people, and they place them in their gardens to scare away birds. While this method works for them, Hartley has some thoughts about these dummies that look like people.

**JOSEPH:** Well, when they are stiff and not moving, the birds haveenough sense to see that it's not a human being, otherwise it would be moving around. But with this method, it's always swinging and in action. Because of this, the birds don't have time to look at it and see that it's not a real human being there.

**ATKINS:** Hartley Joseph says he doesn't hang up his bird scarers in the garden until just about the time that the birds start thinking about attacking his crop. This way, they don't get a chance to get used to these swinging shirts and to realize that they are not real people.

And what did Hartley Joseph finally say about this particular kind of bird scarer he uses to protect his beautiful ripening tomatoes?

**JOSEPH:** I will keep using them as long as I grow tomatoes.

**BURGESS:** Some people say there's nothing you can do about birds.

**JOSEPH:** Well I'll tell you, this one is a good method to chaseaway birds because I have tried several. Once I tried poison. I would not have one tomato here if it had not been for these shirts.

**ATKINS:** And that's the good word from Hartley Joseph, a farmer in St. Lucia.

Serving Agriculture, the Basic Industry, this is George Atkins.

**Note**

Several other methods of protecting crops from birds were fully described in another DCFRN item which you may wish to use in association with this item. It is:

Birds - A Problem for Many Farmers - DCFRN Package 9, Item 1