

## **HARVESTING WINTER SQUASH**

Summer squash such as zucchini and scallop are harvested while immature but winter squash such as acorn, hubbard and butternut are harvested later, in the mature stage, after the rind is tough and seeds have developed. We normally think September is the time that winter squash are harvested. Harvesting too early leads to fruit that shrivels and rots. There are two main characteristics that help tell us when winter squash are mature: color and rind toughness. Winter squash change color as they become mature. Butternut changes from light beige to deep tan.

Acorn is a deep green color but has a ground spot that changes from yellow to orange when ripe. Gray or orange is the mature color for hubbard. A hard, tough rind is another characteristic of mature winter squash. This is easily checked by trying to puncture the rind with your thumbnail or fingernail. If it easily penetrates the skin, the squash is not yet mature and will lose water through the skin -- causing the fruit to dry and shrivel. Also, immature fruit will be of low quality. The stem should also be dry enough that excessive water doesn't drip from the stem.

Winter squash should be stored cool with elevated humidity. Ideal conditions would be 55 to 60 degrees F and 50 to 70 percent relative humidity. Under such conditions, acorn squash will usually last about 5 to 8 weeks, butternuts 2 to 3 months and hubbards 5 to 6 months.

## ***Fertilize Strawberries***

An August application of nitrogen on spring-bearing strawberries is important in order to increase the number of strawberries produced next spring. Plenty of daylight and warm temperatures during June, July and August promotes the growth of new runner, or daughter, plants. As daylight hours dwindle and temperatures grow cooler in September and October, fruit buds for the next year's fruit crop develop. To get a good berry crop next spring, it is important for strawberry plants to be vigorous during this period of fruit bud development. Nitrogen, applied mid August, will help promote fruit bud development. A general application rate is ½ to ¾ pound of actual nitrogen per 100 feet of row. The nitrogen may be in the form of a fertilizer mixture such as ammonium phosphate or 12-12-12, or in a fertilizer containing only nitrogen such as urea or ammonium nitrate. Some specific examples would include:

*12-12-12 at 5.5 pounds per 100 feet of row.*

*Ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) at 3 pounds per 100 feet of row*

*Urea (46-0-0) at 1.5 pounds per 100 feet of row*

On sandy soils, the rate may be increased by about a half. After spreading the fertilizer, water the area applying at least a half-inch of water to move the nitrogen into the strawberry root areas.

## ***Recommended Tall Fescue Cultivars***

Though several cool-season grasses are grown in Kansas, tall fescue is considered the best adapted and is recommended for home lawns. The cultivar K-31 is the old standby and has been used for years. However, there is a myriad of newer cultivars that have improved color, density and a finer leaf texture. Most of these newer varieties are very close to one another in quality.

Each year the National Turfgrass Evaluation Trial rates tall fescue varieties for color, greenup, quality and texture. Quality ratings are taken once a month from March through October. The cultivars listed below received an average rating of 6.0 or above when 2013 and 2014 ratings were averaged. Note that K-31 consistently rates at the bottom. The highest rated cultivars were Thor, Michelangelo, GTO, Traverse 2, Technique, Maestro, Firebird 2, 4th Millennium SRP, Reflection, Black Tail, Avenger II, Falcon V, Terrano, Rowdy, Rockwell, Rhambler 2, Hot Rod, Firewall, Bizem, Titanium 2LS, Hemi, Firecracker, Leonardo and Grande 3. There are a number of other cultivars that did not make this list but should do well in Kansas. Keep in mind that mixes of several varieties may allow you to take advantage of differing strengths. It is not necessary for mixes to contain only the varieties mentioned above. Though K-31 may still be a good choice for large, open areas, the new cultivars will give better performance for those who desire a high-quality turf.

## ***Pine Tip Moth***

Peak flight of the third generation of Nantucket Pine Tip Moth occurred on August 2 in the Wichita area. The best time for control is a spray 10 days following peak flight of the insect. Therefore, the OPTIMUM day for control will be on August 12, 2016 for the Wichita area.

Note that growers further north will spray later. This is a pest primarily of scotch, ponderosa and mugo pines.

## ***Pokeweed***

A number of people have asked the name of the weed with the large leaves and purple-black berries that hang in a cluster. This perennial is known as pokeweed. All parts of this plant are poisonous, especially the roots. Signs of poisoning include abdominal cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, drowsiness and difficulty in breathing. One of the toxins found in pokeweed is the protein lectin, which can cause abnormalities in white blood cells. Surprisingly, young leafy springtime shoots are sometimes eaten after thorough cooking. Though cooking eliminates most of the toxins, there is still a danger of being poisoned from handling and preparing the shoots as well as ingesting improperly cooked plants. Berries can be attractive to children. Cut down and discard pokeweed that might come into contact with kids. This plant is a perennial. You may want to spray it with a herbicide next year before it is large enough to be attractive to children.