

The Grapevine

Keeping up with the Weeds

The rain over the last few weeks has been welcome after the dry fall and winter we had however all that water has kept me out of the garden and the weeds are taking advantage. It's an unfortunate fact that all of our in-ground gardens have a weed seed bank in the soil and once you get behind weeding the garden, it can seem almost impossible to catch up. While the long-range forecast is calling for a dryer pattern to set up later in June, here are some tips to help stay ahead of the weeding during the summer.

- *Weeds vs. Crops*- One of the best steps to keep your garden weed free is to provide an environment that favors the vegetables over the weeds. Plant your vegetables at the ideal times, fertilize the vegetables as needed so they grow vigorously and outcompete weeds, use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to only water the vegetables and don't water between rows where weeds will sprout.
- *Cover the soil*- The less soil surface that sees the sun, the fewer weeds you will have. There are several options available to cover your soil from grass clippings (make sure you haven't applied weed killer) to cardboard boxes flattened to weed mat, it all depends on your preference and how much you want to spend. My plan this summer is to use cardboard boxes as the base then cover the cardboard with lawn clippings, leaves and other composted materials to form a layer 4-5" thick to keep the soil constantly covered. Even if you don't cover the soil around the plants, try to cover the pathways and open spaces between the rows.



- *Use cover crops*- Cover crops are an excellent way to suppress weeds between plants, reduce compaction and add nutrients to the soil. You can plant cover crops in the spring to suppress summer weeds or in the fall after the garden has come out to keep winter weeds from growing. Some common cover crops include winter wheat, annual rye grass, clovers, vetches, peas, soybeans, and buckwheat. I also liked to mix in radishes or a root crop to help break up compacted soil.
- *Use mechanical means*- If possible it's best to hoe, pull or control weeds when they are small but they aren't the only mechanical method of controlling weeds. If you are feeling brave using a flame weeder is an option (although I would avoid it if the weather turns dry) to control a variety of weeds. One of my friends is trying a solar powered weeding robot for her commercial vegetable garden. So far, she has

had great success with her robot keeping up with the weeds and considers it a good investment although it has a limited range of area it can cover.

- *Chemical*- For some weeds, chemicals maybe the best method of keeping them under control but they should be used with caution. Glyphosphate products can be used in the garden, just make sure to use regular glyphosphate and not one of the options that has a residual. Another option is to use Preen or a similar product that prevents the weed seeds from germinating. If you plant to plant a fall garden, be sure any pre-emergent herbicide will have worn off before you plant your fall seeds. With any chemical application, be sure to read the label thoroughly and apply all products according to the label for your safety and the best growth of the garden.

Weeds will unfortunately always be a part of the gardening process. Your best bet is to use several methods to control the weeds in combination to achieve the best overall control. Do your best to prevent the weeds in your garden from flowering and going to seed which will make the problem worse in the coming years. In my experience the best way to prevent weeds is to cover the ground with something to keep the weeds from germinating. You can eventually win the war but there will be several battles along the way.

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Pollinator Plant of the Week-



This week I wanted to highlight a beautiful native pollinator plant in the Cobaea Penstemon. There are approximately 280 different species of native penstemons to the United States and many of them grow native in Kansas. This native grows in the eastern 2/3 of the state and can currently be seen blooming in roadside ditches or along the limestone bluffs of our native prairies. Also known as “beardtongue” this beautiful plant has white to pale purple flowers that bloom on tall stalks from May through June. Interestingly enough the flowers will be a different color based on the location they are growing in. They are easy to spot driving down the highway and in native pastures, especially this time of year. Most range in height from 6 to 40” tall and all attract a wide variety of native bees and pollinators. There are several cultivated varieties that are available with different colors

of blooms, heights and leaf colors. Penstemons grow best in full sun with well drained soils as they do not tolerate consistently wet areas in the garden. They can be used in rock gardens or in the regular landscape for a spring blooming flower. Penstemons are tolerant of drought, deer and are very low maintenance.

Insect of the Week-



This week’s insect is everyone’s favorite, the squash bug. These pests overwinter as adults and are becoming active now looking for mates and host plants. Once mated the females will start laying eggs from June till mid-August. Adult squash bugs are somewhat flattened and 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch long. As an adult, squash bugs are dark-brown and have wings with brown-to-black and orange markings along the outer edge of the body. Nymphs will start out light colored but with each successive molt will gradually get darker in color. Squash bugs feed on the leaves, vines and fruits of squash, pumpkins and other cucurbits using piercing-sucking mouth parts to remove fluid from the plants. Younger, small plants are more susceptible to damage than older plants, however if the numbers get high enough they can kill any size of plant.

The first step to management is to scout, starting in June for all stages of squash bugs on your plants. For small plantings you can use floating row covers to exclude the squash bugs, but you will have to remove the covers to allow bees to pollinate the flowers. For small infestations, or again a few plants, try to pick the bugs off by hand and destroy the insects. This would need to be done every 3-5 days depending on the number of squash bugs you have. You can also place boards on the ground underneath the plants to provide an area for the insects to gather which can make it easier to kill them as needed.

Use “trap plants” on the outside of the garden to catch the mother squash bugs before they reach the main patch. You can then use insecticides or remove those plants once eggs are laid but before they hatch. There are some parasitoid wasps that will attack and kill squash bugs. The tachid fly and *Gryon pennsylvanicum* are two parasitoids that will feed on squash bugs.

Insecticides are a common method of treatment to kill squash bugs. Horticultural oils can be used to smother eggs before they hatch and during young nymph stages. Products containing Carbaryl (Sevin) or Permethrin can be effective at controlling squash bugs when they are young. As the bugs get older they get harder to kill as they develop a waxy cuticle that protects them from chemicals. With any chemical application be sure to get the underside of the leaves and try to apply it early in the morning or late in the evening to be less harmful to pollinators. In the fall, be sure to remove all debris and discard from the area to prevent the squash bug adults from overwintering in your garden. Try to mow the grass around the garden and reduce vegetation to reduce the insect population in your area.

Reminders-

- Stop harvesting asparagus now so it can store up energy for the next year.
- Turn your compost pile periodically through out the growing season.
- Prune the blooms off of lilies and peonies once they finish blooming.
- The [Great Plains Bumble Bee Atlas](#) is a new region-wide community science project aimed at tracking and conserving bumble bees native to North Dakota, South Dakota, and Kansas. Community science means anyone can get involved, no experience is necessary. Click on the link highlighted above and choose “Events.”
- Thin excessive fruit on fruit trees to encourage larger fruit and reduce the chances of breaking branches due to fruit load. The distances listed are the recommendations, try to keep fruit to these distances apart on each branch. Cherries do not need thinned. Thin fruit according to species below:
 - Apples and Pears- 6 to 8” apart. Pick the nicest fruit in the cluster and remove the rest
 - Peaches- 6-8” apart. Try for an average of 7” apart
 - Plums and Prunes- 4-5” apart
 - Apricots- 2-4” apart
- Prune suckers from the base of fruit trees.
- Watch for rust on hollyhock leaves. If you see some spots remove those leaves, when they are dry, as soon as possible and throw away to reduce the spread. You can spray the healthy foliage with a sulfur product to protect it, just be aware sulfur can burn foliage if the temperatures are above 85 degrees within the next 24 hours.

Upcoming Events

- *June 12th: El Dorado Garden Tour- 1 pm to 7 pm*
The El Dorado Main Street along with Walter’s Flowers, Prairie Blossom Nursery and Sutherlands are proud to present the 2022 Garden Tour. You will have the opportunity to tour an English style garden, Butterfly Garden, Sculpture Garden and a Waterfall Garden. Tickets are \$20 and you can purchase them at some Downtown El Dorado Businesses.
- *July 6, 2022: Growing Culinary Mushrooms at Home*
Mushrooms can be a fun and tasty addition to your garden and dinner table. Pam Paulsen, Reno County Horticulture Extension Agent, will cover some of the most commonly cultivated mushroom species and walk through the steps of how to grow them successfully at home. The KSRE Garden hour sessions are held via Zoom starting at noon. For more information or to register [click here](#).