K-STATE
Research and Extension
Butler County

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In this Issue:

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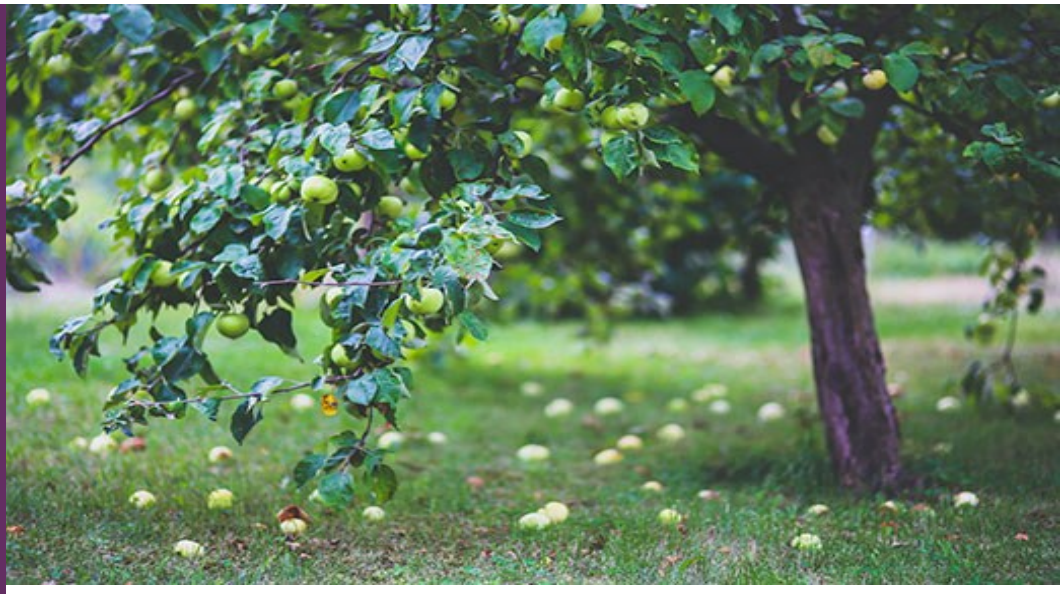
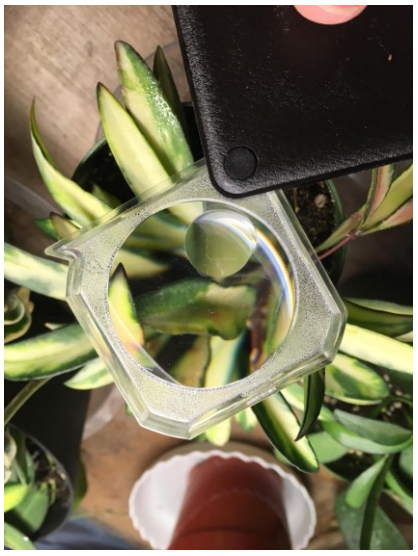


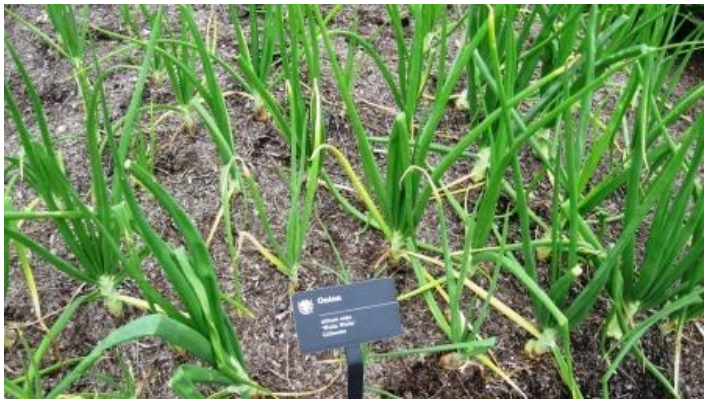
The Grapevine

Why Chemical Applications Fail

I routinely visit with homeowners about issues with their lawns, gardens, and other plants. Sometimes I have people who say that the product they used to control insects, weeds, or diseases didn't work. The issue either comes back or never goes away. There are several reasons why herbicides, insecticides, or fungicides might not work. The first reason that the application wasn't successful was because the wrong product was used. It's vital to correctly identify the issue before making an application. If you use an insecticide to treat a fungal problem or a broadleaf herbicide to control a grass you will not be successful. The second reason a homeowner might have issues with a product is when they don't follow the label. If you use the wrong rate of application or don't reapply the product at the recommended interval (especially for insects that multiply quickly) you won't get effective control of the problem you are having. One of the final reasons a herbicide might not be effective is the weather when it is applied. If the temperature is too cool, or the plants get rained on before the rain fast time that product may not be effective. Always read the label and apply the product based on the recommendations. The label is your friend and it is also the law. The label is a valuable resource and will help any gardener be successful. Be sure to use it to your advantage during the growing season. Happy Growing.



Question of the Week: Overwintering Onions



This week's question was whether growing onions overwinter in Kansas was possible. And while not common, the answer is yes. Fall is an excellent time to grow vegetables in the garden. Still, onions are not usually a crop that we talk about growing, generally because the amount of time they take to mature is longer than our typical fall growing season. While onions are not a crop we talk about, they are a cool-season vegetable that can be planted in the fall and grown overwinter; however, they usually require some protection.

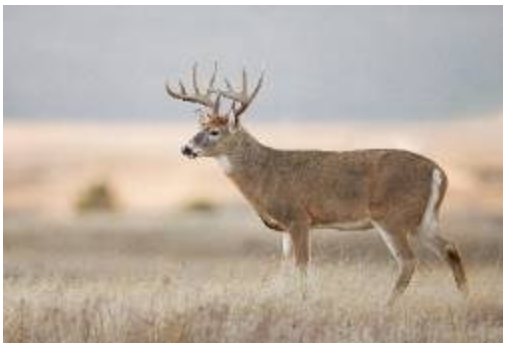
We are a little late if you want to grow onions in the fall. Fall onions should be planted in September in the garden. It's best to use onion plants rather than onion sets or bulbs when planting onions, as some varieties perform better when planted in the fall. Unfortunately, many popular varieties are prone to bolting when planted in the fall and are unsuitable for this growing method. In general, Bridger, Gatekeeper, High Keeper, Keepsake, Tough Ball, Desert Sunrise, and Electric are the varieties that perform best when grown in the fall. Even though onions are cool-season vegetables, they need protection from our winter temperatures. The best option in our area is to use low tunnels with a plastic cover; however, if you have a high tunnel, you can also grow onions in a high tunnel for a slightly earlier harvest. With the protection, onions can survive temperatures below zero with excellent survival rates. Onions planted in the fall can be harvested in June. Research has found that onions planted earlier in the fall tended to have larger bulbs; however, it also found that onions planted earlier were more likely to bolt and start to flower rather than create bulbs.

While we don't typically think of planting onions in the fall, you can grow them through the winter and make the most of a small garden space. Just like garlic, mark where you have the onions planted so you don't till them up in the spring or fall.

Weed of the Week- Henbit

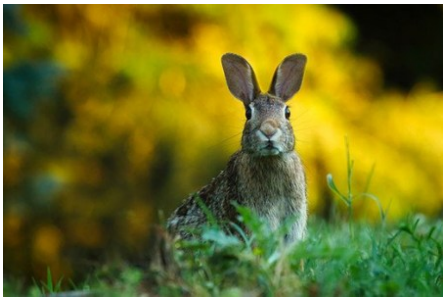
Henbit is a winter annual weed that sprouts in the fall, goes dormant over the winter, and then blooms in the spring. Once we have warm weather, it dies until the fall when the seeds sprout again. This plant is a low-growing member of the mint family with square stems, rounded to heart-shaped leaves with lobed edges, and pink to purple flowers produced at the top of the plant. Control of henbit is best done in the fall before it emerges or right after it comes up. It is too late to spray once the plant has come up in the spring and started to bloom. In the fall, a pre-emergent can be applied in September (as long as you are not seeding cool-season grasses in the area), or you can spray the weeds in October with 2,4-D, Round-up, Trimec, or similar products. Be sure to read the label for the application rate and time of application. For now, enjoy the beautiful blooms beneficial for pollinators, and keep your lawn as healthy as possible to help keep it weed-free. Henbit can be invasive if not controlled; however, it is also beneficial to pollinators, so feel free to let it grow if you wish.

Wildlife in the Yard



While wildlife can be cute and cuddly looking, they can cause severe damage to our landscape plants under the right conditions. It wasn't till one winter in North Dakota that I saw the true extent of the damage that mice, voles, and other rodents can cause in a landscape. That particular winter, we had a mild fall, then a series of blizzards dumped 70+ inches of snow in a month on top of the ground, which froze for the winter due to the insulation from the snow. The small furry critters tunneled at ground level and, unfortunately, chewed completely around the trunks of many small trees in one yard, leading to the eventual death of a large portion of their trees. They never worried about protecting their trees since they hadn't had issues, which had some sad and expensive consequences. We should take steps to keep mice from becoming an issue this winter.

The first step is to remove stacks of lumber, woodpiles, brush, etc, that rodents could hide in to help reduce their living options. Mice won't travel long distances, especially without cover, so removing the hiding places will reduce the chances of having issues. I would also recommend keeping mulch away from the trunks of trees to keep mice from having another hiding place. If you want to mulch around sensitive plants, there are options to keep them safe. You can put a physical barrier around tree trunks or other plants to serve as protection. Plastic tree tubes, wraps, or chicken wire can keep small critters away from your plants. If we have a heavy snowfall or enough snow this winter, where the snow might be taller than your physical barrier, I recommend going out and making your barrier taller.



Chemical repellants can also be an option if a physical barrier isn't possible. They make repellents for rodents and deer that work by taste or smell. We know deer can cause quite a bit of damage to smaller trees, so a repellent can be a great option to keep those plants safe. Chemical taste repellents work by making the bark taste bad so that animals looking for an easy meal look elsewhere. Apply any taste repellent from the soil well past the usual snow level. Spray the trunk and low-hanging branches that rabbits might be able to reach. If snow drifts unusually high around valuable plants, a midwinter spray might be necessary to extend protection higher up the plants. Taste repellents can be reasonably effective if animals have other food sources available nearby. Smell repellants are the other option that can be effective and work via a smell that the animals don't like, such as blood meal or predator urine. Repellents can be a good option, but if animal populations are so high, the weather so severe, or food so scarce that the animals are nearing starvation, they will ignore even the best repellent to get food to eat.

Video of the Week- Cleaning Your Garden

Cleaning up the garden at the end of the season will help eliminate a lot of diseases and insects that can overwinter and cause problems next year. Also, soil prep in the fall can help improve hard, compacted clay soils. Watch the video on the Kansas Healthy Yards website.

Upcoming Events

November 5th- Climate Resilient Gardens

December 3rd- Gifts for Gardeners

Upcoming Events:

October 20th at 12:15 pm-
Bringing Color with Bulbs at Lori's EmporiYum

November 12th at 12:15 pm-
Houseplant Basics at the Andover Library

November 12th at 6 pm-
Houseplants Basics and Beyond at Bradford Memorial Library

November 17th at 12:15 pm-
Companion Planting of Vegetables

November 19th at 5:30 pm- Houseplants Basics and Beyond at Benton Community Building

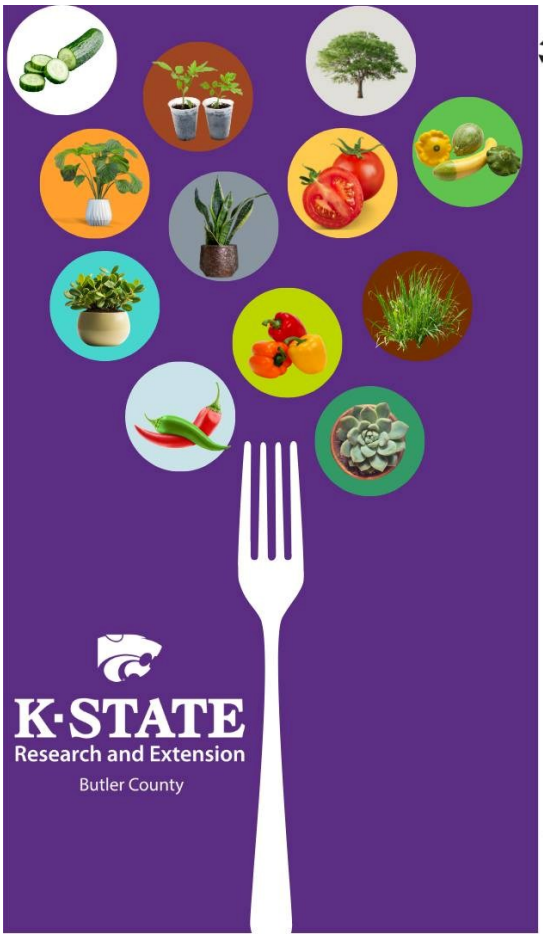
Myth of the Month

Woolly Bear Caterpillars and Winter

Every fall, I love looking for woolly bear caterpillars. Many people in the Midwest have heard at one time or another that if you want a forecast for the upcoming winter, you should look for woolly bear caterpillars, and they will tell you how harsh the winter will be. Woolly or fuzzy bear caterpillars are also known as woolly worms or hedgehog caterpillars, depending on where you live in the United States. Whatever name you call them by, they are often found in the autumn when they leave their food plants and search for a dark and sheltered spot where they can hibernate overwinter.

According to the myth, the amount of black on the woolly bear in the autumn varies proportionally with the severity of the upcoming winter in the location where they can be found. The longer the black bands, the longer and colder the winter will be. The wider the middle brown band, the milder the winter will be. It's also thought that if the black band at the head is longer than the beginning, the weather will be worse, or if the black band at the back is longer, the end of winter will be worse. In addition to the black bands, there are several other myths related to woolly bear caterpillars regarding their direction of travel or how fuzzy their coat is. The myth says that if a caterpillar is traveling south, they are trying to get away from a harsher winter, while if they are traveling north, there will be a milder winter. Some think that the fuzzier the caterpillar, the harsher the winter is.

Despite all these common myths, according to the National Weather Service, there is no truth that a woolly bear caterpillar can predict what the weather will be this fall. The coloring represents how good a growing season the caterpillar had to feed on. The better the growing season, the bigger it will grow and the wider the black bands will be in relation to the brown band in the middle. The color is also related to the age of the caterpillar; the more times they have molted, the older the caterpillar and the redder they will be. A fun fact: There are also 260 different species of Tiger moth, the adult version of the woolly bear, and each has a different color and hair pattern. Interestingly, the caterpillars' coat doesn't keep them warm but helps them freeze in a controlled manner. Once the caterpillars settle in, they produce a natural organic antifreeze called glycerol. They freeze bit by bit until everything but the interior of the cells is frozen. Woolly bears can and do survive temperatures as low as -90 degrees F. These caterpillars can survive in the Arctic, where their lifespan can be as long as 14 years to complete their lifecycle. In our area, they will complete their lifecycle in a year. This myth has existed since colonial times, but it has no truth. Watch for these unique caterpillars this fall as they search for their winter hiding spots.



LUNCH & LEARN

Bring your lunch and join Horticulture Agent, Calla Edwards, over the lunch hour during our monthly Lunch & Learn Program. This will be held over the lunch hour and will cover a variety of horticulture topics.

October 20th
12:15-12:45 p.m.

Lori's EMPORIyum!
1604 Custer Lane
Augusta, KS

October Topic:
Bringing Beauty with Bulbs

Nothing says "Hello Spring" like the cheery smile of a bright yellow daffodil or a bed of colorful tulips. This spring welcome does not just happen, it must be planned. Fall is the ideal time to plant spring flower bulbs in the landscape. Calla will cover everything you need to know to have success with spring-flowering bulbs.