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The Grapevine

Fall Armyworms

It's been four years since the last fall armyworm outbreak, and they are marching across the county. Large numbers of these insects have been found in every town in Butler County. The armyworm or *Spodoptera frugiperda* is a tropical insect species that doesn't overwinter in Kansas. This insect is native to Mexico, Central America, and South America; however, the moths migrate into our area every spring/summer. Female armyworm moths can lay up to 2,000 eggs in clusters of 400 eggs each. Young worms are $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ " long, while mature worms are 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " long. The body color of the worms varies from green to almost black, but all worms will have light stripes visible along the length of the body. They will also have a whitish, inverted "Y" on their darker-colored head. Armyworm larvae prefer to feed on grasses but occasionally feed on non-grass plants. In most cases, the worms will only cause superficial damage, preferring the more tender grass blades to the crown and growing point of the grass; however, under heavy feeding pressure, the larvae can severely damage the lawn in a short period. In extreme cases, which have been spotted in all towns, the population is large enough that it appears the lawn is moving. Grass that has been fed upon may become withered and brown, but it will recover with irrigation or rain. If the feeding pressure is high enough for insecticide use, look for products with the active ingredients of permethrin, cyhalothrin, or spinosad. Happy Growing.



Tips for Picking Fruit



How do you know when to pick apples or pears? Several varieties of pears and apples are ripening and almost ready to pick, but how do you know when they are ready to harvest? For apples, there are a couple of factors that play a role in determining when to pick the fruit:

- *Days from bloom*- many varieties list how many days from bloom until the apple is ripe. Weather can influence the number of days, but as a rule of thumb, you can get pretty close with this measure.
- *Flesh color*- As apples ripen, the flesh turns from light green to white. Pick an apple and cut it open; if it's green, it's not ripe yet.
- *Seed Color*- As the apples ripen, the seeds turn from green to brown, signaling the fruit is ripe and ready to eat.
- *Color change*- As apples mature, the skin color around the stem and at the bottom turns from green to a light yellow. This isn't always reliable in red apples, which may be red instead of yellow.
- *Flavor*- If you know what this variety is supposed to taste like, you can use flavor to indicate that the fruit is ripe.

Pears are ripening now through October; however, unlike apples, we don't wait till pears are fully ripe to harvest them. Pears develop a gritty texture if left to ripen on the tree. Pears that are ready to harvest change to a darker green color, and some varieties have brown spots on the skin. The fruit will separate easily from the stem when ready to be picked. Pears should be stored at refrigerator temperatures for two days to several weeks, depending on the variety, then left on the counter to ripen for several weeks.

Fall Needle Drop of Evergreens

Every fall, pine trees, arborvitae, and spruce trees shed their inner needles in a process called "Needle Drop." While to many, seeing the 2-4-year-old needles turn brown and then drop off their evergreen trees might be concerning, this is a natural, everyday occurrence. We receive calls from concerned homeowners yearly about the dying needles on the inner portion of their pines, spruce, and arborvitae. Those needles aren't productive anymore, and the tree sheds them. The inner needles will turn yellow to brown and slowly fall off throughout the fall and into winter. As long as the inner needles are the only ones that are turning colors, your tree most likely is fine if there is no banding noted on the needles; if the outer needles are starting to turn colors, there could be a disease or other issue going on. In years when the tree has been under stress, such as hot and dry years or even years where it has been abnormally wet, this process can be more noticeable and cause more concern.



Disorder of the Week: Early Fruit Drop of Apples



Nothing is more disappointing than watching your apples grow on the tree only to have them fall off unexpectedly just a few weeks away from ripening. An unexpected apple drop can be a serious concern for some varieties grown in Kansas. All apple cultivars have some fruit drop as they move through the ripening process. Some varieties are very prone to pre-harvest fruit drop.

As apples begin to ripen, they produce large amounts of ethylene, the ripening hormone. Ethylene stimulates softening of fruits and the formation of an abscission layer in the stem. Ethylene enhances the production of enzymes that break down the cell walls and the complex sugars that hold cell walls

together in the abscission zone of the stem. As these glue-like substances break down, they leave the fruit connected only by the vascular strands, which are easily broken. Other stress factors might come into play with pre-harvest apple drop and can be related to the severity of drop from one year to the next. These include orchard and climatic factors such as fruit load, nutrition imbalance, summer pruning, insect or disease issues, and water and weather extremes during the growing season. Let's look at some of the potential causes for early fruit drop in apples.

A large crop of a short-stemmed apple variety, particularly those set in clusters, will “push off” each other close to harvest. Good, early-season thinning, especially reducing clustered fruits, will help prevent this drop. When fruit is pushed off, it stimulates ethylene, which can cause an even more premature drop in the remaining fruits on the tree. Drop is often worse in orchards where soils have incorrect nutrient levels – in particular, low magnesium (Mg), high potassium (K), and high boron (B). Also, the variations in soil type can play a part; for instance, sandy areas will ripen early and drop ahead of heavier soil types.

Pre-harvest drop can be more severe in orchards that are heavily summer pruned. This problem is likely associated with a limitation or deficit of carbohydrate supply from too many leaves being removed, especially younger, more functional leaves. The drop will be increased if pruning reduces the leaf-to-fruit ratio below 20:1. When leaf-infecting insects are high in numbers, they can reduce the photosynthate produced by leaves. This limits carbohydrate availability and can lead to premature fruit drop. Pre-harvest drop is more severe in dry seasons, where irrigation is unavailable. Windy weather close to harvest also impacts fruit drop and can be worse in some varieties, especially those naturally prone to drop.

If you have issues with premature apple drop, you can pick them up early. Here are some recommendations to improve the quality:

- Store your fruit for a few weeks before using it.
 - Many apples sold to grocery stores are stored for weeks or months before hitting the shelves. To ensure the apples can survive long-term storage, the orchards harvest them 1-2 weeks before peak ripeness.
 - Apples are a “climacteric” fruit that ripens somewhat after picking. If you must pick early, try storing the fruit for a while to see if it becomes sweeter before use.
- Use the fruit in baked goods, sauce, or canned goods. These processes almost always call for added sugar that counterbalances the tartness of under-ripe fruit.

Alone, each of these factors can influence premature drop to some degree. However, when they occur in combinations, a severe drop can result. A few options to prevent apple drop for 2026 include proper nutrition, watering when the weather is dry, thinning your fruit early in the year, and pruning early in the spring.

Insect of the Week- Green June Bugs

This week, we are highlighting the Green June Beetle. These metallic green insects are nearly one inch long, but start their life cycle as grubs in the soil. Green June beetle larvae are edible (Lion King movie, anyone?) and often found in the ground, on sidewalks, and driveways around the home. Adult beetles feed on the foliage and fruit of trees in mid-summer, usually causing damage to the foliage similar to that of Japanese beetles, just not quite on the same scale. They are particularly fond of peaches, plums, and grapes. Grubs feed on decaying organic matter and the underground portions of plants such as sweet potatoes and carrots. Unlike other grubs, these insects do not cause damage to the turf other than the tunneling they do. In a unique note, Green June beetle grubs have been known to feed on Japanese beetle grubs and cutworms, so there is some thought that they could have a beneficial impact. Usually, control is not needed for these insects; however, the grubs are susceptible to carbaryl sprinkled on the soil surface (don't water it, as the grubs come to the surface), unlike other grubs in the soil. The adults can be easily caught or knocked into a bucket of soapy water if they are a nuisance. These insects are attracted to overripe fruit, so pick fruits as they ripen to reduce the chances the adults will visit your orchard.



The green June beetle on a fig leaf.

Photo by J. R. Baker

Video of the Week



Preserve it Fresh, Preserve it Safe

If your garden is overflowing with fresh produce, what will you do with it? Besides enjoying the fresh flavors or sharing with family and friends, preserving the produce for later use is a great way to enjoy that taste of summer later in the year. Karen will highlight some easy ways to safely preserve your food. Watch the video on the [K-State Research and Extension](#)

[Garden Hour Website.](#)



Upcoming Events

September 3rd- Shrubs that Thrive in Kansas

October 1st-Keys to Successful Community Garden Spaces

November 5th- Climate Resilient Gardens

Upcoming Events:

August 13th at 12:15 pm-
Bring your lunch and learn about growing Cut Flowers at the Andover Library

August 18th at 12:15 pm-
Bring your lunch and learn about growing and using Squash at Lori's EmporiYum

September 10th at 12:15 pm-
Bring your lunch and learn about Composting at the Andover Library

Watermelon, Black Bean, and Corn Salsa

Salsa made without tomatoes? Watermelon Salsa is made with juicy watermelon, black beans, onions, and jalapenos tossed in tangy lemon juice. It's delicious as a dip and equally tasty over your favorite grilled meat or seafood.



Ingredients

- 1 can corn kernels, rinsed and drained
- 1 can black beans, rinsed and drained
- ½ medium purple or white onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 to 2 jalapeno peppers, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 tablespoons salad oil (such as canola or olive)
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1 ½ cups watermelon, chopped (with seeds removed)

Optional:

- Fresh cilantro, chopped
- Cucumbers, diced
- Avocado, diced

Directions

1. Mix all ingredients except watermelon.
2. Gently fold in watermelon and chill.
3. Serve with baked chips or grilled meat, poultry, or fish as a side dish.

Recipe Source: [North Dakota State University](#)



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.

August 13th
12:15-12:45 p.m.

Andover Public Library
1511 E Central Ave
Andover, KS

August Topic: Cut Flowers

Start your own cut flower garden to bring the beauty of flowers indoors! This session covers the basics of establishing a cut flower garden. Learn ideas for preparing soil, seed starting, flower varieties, irrigation set-up, maintenance, and even marketing tips for your floriferous crops.

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August 18th
12:15-12:45 p.m.

Lori's EmporiYum Lab!
1604 Custer Ln.
Augusta, KS

**August Topic: Squash &
How to Use It**

Squash is a very fragile vegetable in the garden. Learn tips on preventing insect issues & recipes to use your surplus of squash this season.

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