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The Grapevine

No-Mow May?

Have you ever heard of the No-Mow May movement? No Mow May is a British pollinator movement that Appleton, Wisconsin, first embraced. Numerous Wisconsin residents pledged to forego spring mowing. Over time, more people adopted this movement in an effort to help the pollinators. The question is, does it actually work? Seeing an opportunity, Lawrence University researchers decided to study this phenomenon. The researchers compared the diversity and abundance of pollinator species between unmowed residential lawns and mowed parkland. They published a study showing that unmowed residential lawns attracted more bee species and larger quantities compared to the mowed parkland.

The Lawrence University research study was published and received considerable attention in the national press, including an article in the New York Times. Then an unexpected development occurred. On November 18, 2022, the original research study was retracted due to “several potential inconsistencies in data handling and reporting.”

I have never been a fan of No-Mow May for cool-season grasses in Kansas for several reasons. First, it’s not good for the lawn and the plants, including weeds, growing there. When you finally do mow, you remove more than 1/3 of the grass at a time, damaging the grass and leading to more weed issues. The second reason is that most of the weeds are dandelions, which, while pollinators visit them, lack several critical amino acids to keep pollinators healthy. If you want to help the pollinators, there are better options, including planting native flowers that bloom early in the spring, moving to a native lawn mixed with flowers, or planting non-natives beneficial to bees. Happy Growing!

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After the Storm

Spring in Kansas often brings severe weather, and with it comes damage to trees. So far this spring, we have been lucky and avoided most severe weather, but that can change anytime. Unfortunately, severe weather will continue to happen; we live in Kansas after all, and while we can't control the weather, we can have the tools to handle the aftermath.

Your priority should be any dangling limbs or limbs barely connected to the tree. These limbs can easily fall and hurt people or property, and they should be removed ASAP before you do anything else with the tree. After you have removed the hazards, it's time to take a break and deal with other issues. The trees, for the most part, have stood for years, and waiting a few days or weeks will not hurt them in the long run. Often, our first thought is to get the tree taken care of immediately, and while that's important to do if the tree or branches pose a danger to humans or property, general pruning can wait.

The second step is to assess the damage done and determine the best steps to handle it. Once you have checked the area for safety concerns (powerlines, dangling limbs, etc), look over the tree. Trees that are missing less than 50% of their canopy and have minor damage to the main trunk or major limbs will survive and be fine with some pruning. Once a tree has lost more than 50% of its canopy, it becomes a bit trickier to determine if it can be salvaged. If the main structure of the tree is still intact (trunk and main limbs), then the tree could potentially be saved, but that depends on the sentimental value of the tree, how much it would cost to replace it, and the tree's health before the storm.

Once you have assessed the damage to the tree and determined what needs to be pruned out, it's time to clean up the tree. Before doing that, ask yourself if you feel comfortable pruning, how high up in the tree you must get, and how big the limbs you need to prune. Hiring a professional arborist to prune high in the tree and deal with large limbs may be best. When pruning branches over 3" in diameter, I recommend using the three-cut method to prevent tearing the bark. The first cut is on the bottom side of the limb about a foot from the trunk. This cut prevents the bark from tearing when the limb falls off. The second cut is from the top, is 2-3 inches beyond the first cut, and goes through the limb. This cut removes most of the weight from the branch and makes it easier to handle. The last cut is just beyond the branch collar, with a slight swelling or wrinkle in the tree's bark. This collar contains the cells to heal the branch after the cut. If bark was torn when limbs broke off during the storm, prune off the loose bark back to where it is solidly attached to encourage growth and healing. Wound treatments are unnecessary when pruning branches and, in some cases, can slow the plant's healing.

Commonly, trees will be blown over in storms, and while large trees that have fallen over cannot be saved, smaller trees with at least ½ of their roots still in the ground could be pulled back upright and staked. Remove some soil from the hole before the tree is pulled upright so the roots are below ground level. Once the tree is pulled back up, cover the roots with dirt as needed. Stake the tree using 2-3 lines.

After a disaster and a tree has been damaged, it is very common for people to want to pamper their tree and give it extra attention while it is recovering. This can cause more issues for our trees. If your tree is in your yard and you are fertilizing your lawn, it is getting all the nutrients it needs, and extra fertilizer will not help it recover. Most trees will survive without extra water; however, watering your tree once a week can be beneficial if we have dry weather. Your tree will be fine if you are already watering your lawn. Our trees are resilient, and very little care is needed after a storm to help them survive. It is crucial to watch damaged trees for several years after the storm, as insects and diseases are more likely to infect trees that are stressed from the damage. While there are chemicals you could apply, they likely would do more harm than good in the long run. If you do start seeing an issue, first get it diagnosed so you can treat it properly, then treat it.

Insect of the Week- Scale Insects

This week's insect of the week is the scale insect. Scale insects come in various shapes, sizes, types, and colors. I call scale insects the sneaky killers because they often go unnoticed compared to their flashier friends, such as mealybugs, spider mites, and aphids. Scale insects come in various shapes, but one thing they all have in common is a waxy or shell-like covering. Most scale insects are tan or brown, but some have a white, fuzzy covering similar to mealybugs. They are typically less than ¼" in length, which helps them blend into the plants they live on. The photo to the right shows kermes scale on an oak tree. Scale insects feed on plants by sucking sap out of the leaves or stems. Most often, the infestation is discovered by the stunted growth of the plant, the presence of "honeydew," a sticky substance excreted by the insects, or the black "sooty mold" that grows on the honeydew. Control can be difficult for a couple of reasons. The first is that the waxy covering of the insect protects it from many insecticides. Second, different scale insects hatch at various times of the year, so a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Finally, once you see the adults, it's too late, as insecticides aren't effective.

For lightly infested houseplants, use a Q-tip and rubbing alcohol to rub off all the scale insects you can see. For heavily infested houseplants, you will want to move them outside and spray using a chemical with the active ingredients that include insecticidal soaps, pyrethrin, rotenone, resmethrin, and acephate. You will have to cover the plant thoroughly and spray every week or so for a month, depending on the product label, to get an adequate level of control. If the plant regrows after being pruned back, cut off the areas with the heaviest infestation and treat them. If the plant is heavily infested, it might be best to throw the plant away and start over. For outdoor plants, there are a few treatment options. The best treatment is a dormant oil application in the winter before the scale develops hard shells. You can also spray with a pyrethroid product in the fall when the scale is in the crawler stage. A systemic insecticide application can work. However, it can take a year to be effective.

Video of the Week

Companion Plants in your Garden

Many gardeners have heard that marigolds repel pests in vegetable gardens or that beans dislike fennel. These sentiments are often attributed to a practice called "companion planting." But does companion planting really work? Join Pam and Laura for a discussion on the research behind companion planting as we dispel common myths and discuss which benefits companion planting can offer your garden. To watch the video, check out the Kansas Garden Hour website.

Question of the Week- Fireblight

Our question for the week is about a bacterial disease called fireblight. This pathogen impacts the *Rosacea* family of ornamental trees and shrubs. While it is not native to the US, it was first reported in New York in the 1700s and is prevalent across the United States. Fireblight is most common on apple, crabapple, pear, cotoneaster, quince, serviceberry, and many other trees and shrubs. The infections commonly begin with the flowers and spread into the shoot and the leaves of the impacted branch. The infected leaves and shoots turn dark brown or black, and the shoot tip curls downward into a characteristic "shepherd's crook" as seen in the photo to the right. The disease can also cause cankers on the trunk and larger branches. The bark on the cankered stem is dark, may be sunken or cracked, and when the disease is active, there may be a bacterial ooze emitting from the area. This disease is most severe during moderately warm temperatures ranging from 70-81 degrees with rainfall. Bacteria are spread by wind, rain, and insects that spread the pathogen from blooming flowers. The bacteria can also colonize open wounds caused by wind or storm damage, pruning, or other wounding activities. If not treated, fireblight can kill an entire tree over a period of time. While some treatments are available for fireblight, the best control is to prune any infected branches out 12 to 18" below any visible symptoms. Conduct the pruning during dry weather and disinfect your pruners in between each cut using bleach or rubbing alcohol. If a tree has a history of fireblight, you can apply copper products before bud break in the spring to prevent the inoculation of the flowers. Other treatments must be applied before any infection of fireblight. For more information on fireblight, check out this publication: https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/fire-blight-2-907/

Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:
June 4th- Native and Ornamental Grasses for Kansas

July 2nd- Cutting Edge Efforts in Kansas Demo Gardens

August 6th- Innovations in Horticultural Research at Kansas State University

Upcoming Events:

May 14th at 6 pm
Attracting Pollinators to the Garden at the Bradford Memorial Library

May 21st at 5:30 pm
Gardening with Pollinators at Benton Community Building

June 18th at 5:30 pm
Troubleshooting Issues in the Garden at Benton Community Building

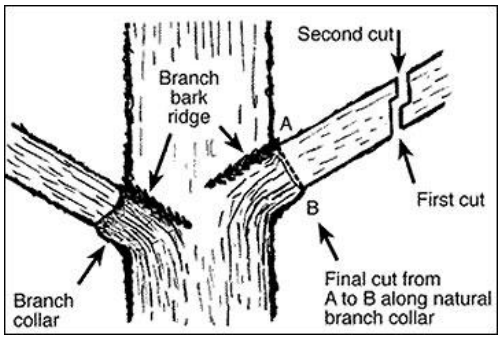
Myth or Misconception?

Painting or Sealing Pruning Cuts Helps Healing

This month's myth or misconception is one that I commonly get asked variations of throughout the year when someone is pruning a tree, has a tree damaged by a storm, or has a crack in the tree's bark. It is a common belief that we should paint or seal the wounds we make in trees, just like we do with bandages when we have cuts or scrapes on our skin.

In decades past, recommendations were often made to apply tree paint to wounds. The idea was that this paint would prevent decay, help speed healing, and improve the appearance of the cut. Although these claims have been debunked for years, many tree wound dressing products can be purchased online or at garden supply stores. Many are petroleum-based and advertised as waterproof and flexible to keep insects and fungi from invading the pruned areas. Better yet, some of these products claim they can be used for multiple purposes, from waterproofing and sealing gutters and roof flashings, to protecting the undersides of lawnmower decks. These materials don't seem like they would be healthy to apply to living tissue.

The reality is that pruning paint may impede healing and encourage the growth of rot organisms and insect infestation. Rather than seal out infection, wound dressings often seal in moisture and decay. In most cases, it is best to let wounds seal on their own. Over millennia, trees have developed effective mechanisms for this. Unlike people or animals, woody plants are unable to heal damaged tissues. Instead, they compartmentalize wounds with layers of cells that prevent damage from spreading any further. A properly pruned tree or shrub will be able to seal off the wound and prevent further damage. Remember to use the three-cut method to prevent bark from being torn when pruning. Bigger wounds will take longer to heal, but they will heal in their own time.



The exact process applies to trees damaged in storms and those that have developed cracks in their bark. They will heal in their own time without any help. I have heard of people wanting to fill holes in the tree with cement or other products to seal it up. Although it may be tempting to plug a large opening with cement or foam, neither of these materials will bond with the wood of the tree, and they will hold moisture, speed the development of wood decay fungi, and obstruct the natural compartmentalization process. The best option is to monitor the area and let nature take its course.

Native & Ornamental Grasses of Kansas

Wednesday, June 4th 12:00PM -1:00PM CST

Join Markis Hill, Johnson County Horticulture Extension Agent, as he explores Kansas's native and ornamental grasses. Learn about grasses that thrive in the state's climate, including drought-tolerant, low-maintenance species. Gain tips on selecting, planting, and caring for these grasses, highlighting their aesthetic, environmental, and wildlife benefits. Gain valuable knowledge for creating sustainable, beautiful landscapes with grasses suited to Kansas's conditions.

Register Here!

Please register for this free Zoom Webinar at:
ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour

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