K-STATE
Research and Extension
Butler County

August 18th, 2025

In this Issue:

- Termites
- Fall Lawn Care
- Season Extension
- Cicada Killer
- Myth of the Month

Address:

Kansas State Research and Extension
Butler County
206 N Griffith St., Ste A
El Dorado, KS 67042

Phone Number:

316-321-9660

Email:

callae@ksu.edu

Office Hours:

Monday- Thursday
7:30 am- 5:00 PM

Friday
7:30 am- 11:30 am

The Grapevine

Preventing Termites

The thought of termites causes some homeowners to panic. While these insects can become quite destructive, the structural damage caused by termites occurs slowly. A mature colony eats only one-fifth of an ounce of wood a day. While we are all familiar with treating for termites, it's better to prevent termites from invading your home rather than treating for them after they have started working on your home.

The best safeguard against termites is proper building construction. During the construction of a home or building, never permit boards or scraps of wood to become buried in the backfill next to the foundation or under slab floors, porches, steps, and terraces. The wood serves as food for termites, which may move up and into the structure later. For all structures, exterior woodwork should be a minimum of 6 to 8 inches above grade. Beams in the crawl space under homes should be at least 18 inches above ground to permit easy inspection. Lumber near the soil, such as poles, posts, etc., should be treated with a wood preservative. Commercially pressure-treated wood will last for many years. Ensure no wood is in contact with the soil next to the structure. This includes wood fencing, piles of firewood, trellises, wood porches, wood steps, and flower boxes. Provide ventilation openings in foundations at the rate of 2 square feet to 25 running feet of outside foundation wall to keep the ground dry. Shrubbery should be planted far enough from the vents to permit air circulation. Make sure downspouts carry water away from the building. All houses or buildings built on concrete slabs are especially susceptible to termite attack through expansion joints, cracks, openings around plumbing, etc. Termites can pass through a crack as small as 1/32 of an inch. Chemical pretreatment of the soil is recommended before concrete is poured.

Fall Lawn Care

Fall is one of the most important times of the year for your cool-season lawn. It's especially important this fall with the impact the armyworms have had across the county. With the cooler daytime and nighttime temperatures, the grass has started to grow after a period of semi-dormancy through the heat of the summer. For a cool-season lawn, September is the most important month when it comes to fertilizer. Nitrogen applied during September helps thicken the stand and encourages the development of a healthy root system. A November application (at about the time of the final mowing of the season) helps the turf build food reserves. This enables the lawn to green up earlier in the spring, without the excessive shoot growth often accompanying early spring N applications. Most tall fescue lawns need approximately one pound of nitrogen in the September or November applications. The best type of fertilizer for the September application is a mix of quick and slow-release nitrogen sources. Mulching grass clippings is also an excellent way to add nitrogen to the soil and can reduce your need for nitrogen by up to 25%.

Fall is an excellent time of the year to control weeds in your lawn. Next year's dandelions have germinated, and right now, all weeds are moving nutrients into their roots to help them make it through the long winter, which means broadleaf herbicides will also be taken to the roots. These young plants are small and easily controlled with herbicides such as 2,4-D or combination products (Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, Weed-Out) that contain 2,4-D, MCPP, and Dicamba. The best way to prevent weeds in your lawn is to have a thick, healthy stand of grass, but that is a conversation for a different time. It is impossible to control 100% of lawn weeds, which is OK!

This fall, as we prepare to mow the yard for what is hopefully one of the last times of the year, it's time to think about preparing your lawn mower ready for its long winter break. Be sure to drain the gasoline from gas-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer to prevent the gas from becoming thick and gummy. Check your spark plug or replace it so you are ready to mow in the spring. If you have a riding lawn mower or one with a battery, remove the battery and clean the terminals to prevent corrosion.

Once you have serviced the engine, be sure to check the blades. Dull blades can damage the grass when you cut it and leave a "feathered" look on the ends of the grass blades. As you sharpen the blades, check for damage. If you can't smooth it out, the blades must be replaced. Grind or file the edge of the blade till it is about 1/32 inch, as a razor-sharp edge can lead to a poor cut. Clean the blades and the underside of the mower to remove any matted grass.

If you seeded your yard this fall, continue to water it to keep the seedlings growing and ensure they are more likely to survive the winter. I recommend watering your lawn every couple of weeks.

Take Away:

- Apply lawn herbicides as little as possible each year.
- A one-time fall application will most effectively control perennial weeds.
- Spraying: Wear Boots! Wear Long Sleeves! Wear Gloves! Back AWAY from the application area – DON'T walk INTO it! READ THE LABEL! UNDERSTAND THE LABEL.
- Be sure to service your lawn mower so it's ready to go in the spring.
- Water your lawn as needed so the soil is moist in winter.

Season Extension in the Garden

We had some beautiful, almost fall-feeling weather a week ago. Unfortunately, the August heat soon returned, but it was a friendly reminder that fall is coming. If you decided to plant a fall garden this year (it's time to plant leaf lettuce if you haven't already), you might want to look into ways to extend your gardening season. Our first frost of the year typically arrives sometime in October, but often we will have some beautiful growing conditions afterward if we can keep the vegetables alive through that first cold snap. There are several ways to keep those vegetables going longer into the fall. Let's take a look at some options to extend your gardening season.

There are many ways to extend your vegetable growing season, whether growing later in the fall or growing vegetables earlier in the spring. One of the easiest methods is to utilize floating row covers over the top of the plants, similar to the photo above. Floating row covers are spun-bonded polyester or polypropylene fabric that comes in various thicknesses depending on what you plan to use it for. You can use the fabric to create a low tunnel with hoops to hold the row cover over the top of the plants. Floating row covers will work to keep cool-season crops warm during frosts, and even under snow; however, there are limits to how cold floating row covers can keep plants warm. This option works to keep the plants warmer. The thinner fabrics can also be used to exclude unwanted insects, such as cabbage moths, from plants during the growing season and into the fall.

Cold frames are another option for extending the growing season by starting plants in the spring and allowing you to grow cold-tolerant vegetables late into the winter. Cold frames are typically low wooden boxes or frames with glass (often old storm windows), polycarbonate, or polyethylene film covers, which are set in the soil or over beds in the garden. Cold frames are usually constructed with a sloping top and set facing the south to capture as much sun as possible. Tops may also be peaked or arched with hoops that support a polyethylene film covering. Polyethylene film is the same as plastic sheeting, but special greenhouse film is used for cold frames and high tunnels. It is typically six mils thick and treated with a UV-blocking material to last about four years.

Low tunnels are hoop-supported row covers that are too low to walk in. Tunnels high enough to walk in are called high tunnels. Low tunnels may be covered with polyethylene film or floating row cover and may vary in width to span a single row or one or more beds in the garden. Floating row covers of varying weights can be used during much of the year and replaced by polyethylene film during the winter. Lighter row cover fabric can be used during the spring and summer, while heavier row covers can be used in the late and early winter for freeze protection. Greenhouse polyethylene is the preferred plastic covering in winter because it can be saved and reused from year to year, but standard six-mil polyethylene may be easier to obtain.

Fresh vegetables are a staple of many households, and there are many ways to extend the growing season long past the first frost, well into winter. In Kansas, there are many years you could be harvesting fresh produce until Thanksgiving or later, using some form of season extension. Last winter, I had a broccoli plant that survived all winter under leaves to be eaten in the spring. Try one of these season extension ideas this fall in your garden today.

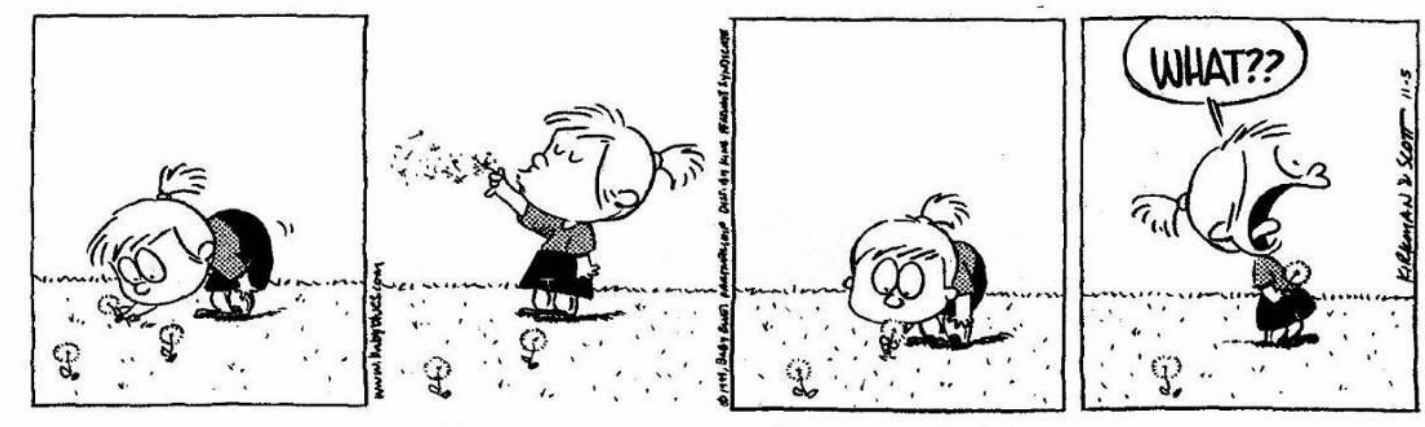
Insect of the Week- Cicada Killer

The Eastern Cicada Killer is the largest wasp in Kansas and is a native of the United States east of the Rocky Mountains and down into Mexico. This large wasp can be up to an inch and a half long and weigh a gram. The adults have a rust-colored head, a black abdomen, and three yellow bands. These wasps are often found congregating in the same areas, giving the appearance of a hive; however, that is simply because they are attracted to the same type of location for nesting. Cicada killers are solitary wasps, with the females digging a burrow in the ground and hunting to feed the young. The female will dig up to 4 burrows in her lifetime, which can be up to 40" deep and contain up to 16 chambers for young. These wasps hunt cicadas for food and will kill 100 or more cicadas in their lifetime. Females sting the cicada to stun and kill it, then drag it into the burrow, leaving one cicada with her male offspring and two to three with the females. She will then lay an egg, and the young will eat the cicadas over approximately 4 days before spinning a cocoon to wait till next spring when they pupate and emerge as adults. Control is usually unnecessary as males cannot sting, and females will rarely sting. The nests can occasionally damage turf and small plants, but spraying is typically unnecessary. If needed, spray can be applied directly to the burrow's entrance, but if the adults have left, the larvae will likely survive to hatch next year.

Video of the Week

Fall Lawn Care- Planting and Overseeding Tall Fescue

Fall is undoubtedly the most critical time of year to care for your Tall Fescue lawns. Whether you are starting a new lawn or thickening up an existing lawn, there are many planting tips & tricks that you need to know. Matthew will cover the best tips for soil preparation, seed selection, planting techniques, and planting time to help you have the best lawn on the block! 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 Resiliant Gardens

Upcoming Events:

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

Myth of the Month

"Organic Means Pesticide Free"

One of the most common beliefs in gardening is that organically grown plants are grown without chemicals. This can be a touchy subject for many people, especially regarding food products, so let's look at this statement and see whether it is fact or fiction.

One of the biggest drivers of the above phrase is the lack of consistency in what "organic gardening" truly is. Many people consider organic gardening without chemicals, while others believe organic gardening only limits you to using natural chemicals, not synthetic ones. This has led to the current confusion. By dictionary definition, organic means "things that are natural or related to nature," while organic gardening is "a method or production without the use of artificial agents." Will this dictionary definition change people's opinion on what they consider "organic"? No, it likely won't. However, the organic produce industry operates under the dictionary definition of organic, not the homeowner's. This means if you purchase organic produce from the grocery store, it likely isn't as chemical-free as you thought. On that note, if you want to buy chemical-free produce, I would have conversations with local growers and find one that grows completely chemical-free vegetables.

Now that we have defined what organic truly is, let's look at what is considered an organic chemical. Organic products are made from naturally occurring products; we haven't altered the chemical formula from its natural form. These products can be processed or extracted to make them easier to use (Neem Oil, for example). These products are often very effective and can work well when used correctly. The downside of organic chemicals is that they usually break down quickly in the environment and have a shorter residual lifespan, requiring more frequent reapplication. The other concern is that they are often non-specific and can harm beneficial insects and the insects you are trying to control. Many synthetic chemicals are derived from natural sources but may have been altered to last longer in the sunlight or be specific to a particular type of insect.

In my opinion, everyone should garden in a way that works for them while considering the environmental impact. Despite what many believe, Organic gardening is not always chemical-free, so be aware of what you might be purchasing if you aren't growing your own.

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 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.