Those darn Grasshoppers....

Grasshoppers are starting to become a problem across Butler County. These insects are most common during periods of hot, dry weather and with last year’s drought it is likely that we will have a larger than normal population of these insects. There are over 100 different species of grasshopper in Kansas but luckily there are only a few that cause damage to our home landscapes and gardens. Typically, grasshoppers are more of a problem for rural locations, but they can become a pest in urban gardens as well. Unfortunately, because of their mobility grasshoppers can be difficult to control, and one size doesn’t fit all when it comes to reducing the population.

When it comes to biology, not all grasshoppers are created equal even though there are some similarities between species. Most species of grasshoppers will lay their eggs in the fall in non-crop locations such as ditches and fencerows in pods of 8-30 eggs. The eggs will hatch in the spring from April to June depending on the species of grasshopper and the soil temperature. From there the eggs will go through five stages of growth over 35-50 days before becoming adults. Those first few days after the eggs hatch play a big role in how many grasshoppers survive. If there are adverse weather conditions or the right food isn’t available many of the grasshoppers will die. Most species only have one lifecycle in a year but the differences in how spring temperatures impact the hatching of eggs and the stages can lead to successive hatchings of eggs and make it seem like an endless hatch of new grasshoppers all summer long. What makes grasshopper control hard is that a hungry grasshopper can fly for miles looking for new sources of food so while you may have killed the grasshoppers in your yard they can easily come in from somewhere else.

The first thought on many gardener’s mind when they see a grasshopper in their yard is that they need to control the insects however it’s important to pay attention to what the grasshopper is eating before treating. Many species of grasshoppers only feed on grasses and sedges, some restrict their feeding to weeds and some eat broadleaf plants that we want to keep. In a garden setting carrots, lettuce, corn and beans are the most likely to be eaten while tomatoes, squash (leaves) and peas are the least likely. If they aren’t feeding on your plants, leave them alone. If possible pick plants that are not a preferred food by grasshoppers, Oklahoma State has a wonderful list here, to reduce the likelihood they will munch on your flowers or provide a bait crop to keep the hopping insects happy and away from other plants. If there is a plant that is very susceptible to grasshopper damage that needs to be protected use floating row covers over plants to exclude the pests. If the infestation warrants spray use chemicals with the active ingredients carbaryl, cyfluthrin or acephate (ornamental plants only). Pyrethrins work but only have a limited residual effectiveness on grasshoppers. In really large areas, you don’t have to spray every plant in order for the chemical to be effective since the grasshoppers are mobile. You can usually get by with spraying only part (around 50%) of the plants to help control the insects. There are also grasshopper baits that are available on the market that can work for smaller areas but they can be cost prohibitive for large lawns or gardens.

Grasshoppers are always going to be around and munching on plants even in years where the population is lower. While they can be a pest and the photo above gives me the heebie jeebies they are a valuable part of the ecosystem providing food for birds, other insects and surprisingly coyotes. Unless there is a major infestation going on in your yard or garden try providing bait crops, searching for egg laying areas in the fall or create a yard where birds visit to help control these insects rather than resorting to sprays unless it’s absolutely necessary. Happy Growing!!!
It’s time to treat for bagworms!!! They have hatched in our area!!!!!

Beating the Heat

The summer heat will start to arrive this week and it looks like it will be hanging around so we should be taking some precautions when working outside. With high temperatures and humidity comes the dangers of heat stroke and heat exhaustion. It’s important to determine what are the priorities to accomplish during the limited amount of time when the weather is cooler. Try to make a short list of what has to be done, what should be done and things to do if you have time and the weather allows it.

- Limit activity to early in the morning or late in the evenings. On hot days, avoid working outside after 10:30 am or before 7:30 pm so you miss the hottest part of the day. Try to water your gardens during the cooler parts of the day so the moisture is less likely to evaporate before the plants can get to it.
- Be sure to wear light weight and light-colored clothing when working outside to keep as cool as possible. A wide brimmed hat will help keep the sun and sweat out of your eyes. Always wear sunscreen when working in the sun to avoid getting a sunburn. Remember to reapply sunscreen according to the directions if you are outside for extended amounts of time.
- Drink plenty of water when you are outside and take breaks often in the shade to cool down. It can also help to alternate water with a drink containing electrolytes if you plan to be outdoors for a longer period of time.
- Be sure to know the signs of heat stroke and heat exhaustion. If you start to feel cool and clammy, have nausea, a headache or start to feel lethargic it’s time to stop and try to cool off. If you believe you are suffering from heat exhaustion don’t immediately go into a highly air-conditioned room or cold shower as this can cause disorientation and make you lose consciousness. Try using cool clothes on your head and neck first to cool off then go inside. If you think you might have heat stroke call for help or go to the doctor ASAP to get treatment.

As with any outdoor activity it’s important to be aware of the weather and make sure you listen to what your body is telling you its limits. Stay safe and hydrated this summer.

Weed of the Week- Virginia Creeper

Virginia creeper is a woody deciduous vine that is a member of the grape family. It is native to the eastern and central parts of North America from Canada down into Mexico. This plant is often confused with poison ivy as both are deciduous vines that grow in similar locations however poison ivy only has three leaflets per leaf while Virginia creeper has five leaflets per leaf. This vine is very vigorous in its growth pattern and can rapidly grow 30 to 50 feet long or more. It clings to houses, plants, fences and other structures by adhesive holdfasts or sucker disks located at the tendril ends or will creep along the ground if there is nothing to climb in the area. The leaves turn a brilliant red in the fall, especially in areas where it receives lots of sunlight. The flowers on this plant are insignificant but they do provide nectar for bees. The fruits are enjoyed by songbirds and small mammals however the fruit is poisonous to humans and can cause nausea, abdominal pain, bloody vomiting and diarrhea, headache, sweating, drowsiness and death in some cases. Virginia creeper does well in places where it has room to grow or expand. Use it as a vertical screen between houses, on a sturdy trellis or let it run free over the ground in sloped areas to assist with erosion management. This plant does have a high flammability rating and shouldn’t be planted near a house in areas where fire is a concern. You should also keep it away from other plants, painted surfaces or homes as it can cause serious damage to gutters, wooden shingles or pull the paint off of the walls if left to grow unchecked.
Plant of the week - Maximilian Sunflower
This spring I found a plant growing at the edge of my garden and I decided to leave it to see what it was. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that it was a Maximilian Sunflower when it started blooming a couple weeks ago. This native perennial was named after Prince Maximilian of Germany who was a naturalist that lead an expedition to the west from 1832 to 1834. This sunflower is a desirable range plant that is commonly eaten by livestock. It also produces a heavy crop of seeds making it a valuable source for wildlife (likely how this plant ended up in my garden). The Maximilian sunflower typically ranges in height from 3-10 feet tall. The leaves are long and narrow ranging in length from 2 to 10 inches. The flower heads are up to 5 inches across and there are often multiple on a plant. This perennial does form large colonies in its native range. In Kansas it can commonly be found in dry open areas such as prairies, bald knobs, limestone glades, roadsides and waste areas. While not commonly used in landscaping this plant works well for sunny borders, wild or native plant gardens, cottage gardens, naturalized areas and meadows or prairies. It tolerates a wide range of soils including poor sandy soils, clay soils and is very tolerant of drought and dry soils. I think I’ll transplant this one to a slightly different location and enjoy its beautiful blooms near my garden for years to come.

Issue of the Week - Lack of Fruit on Trees
Over the last few weeks there have been several questions regarding the lack of fruit on some fruit trees across the area. There are several reasons why a fruit tree that has produced fruit in the past does not have any this year. One of the most common causes is cold temperatures when the tree was blooming. Apricot and peach trees are particularly vulnerable to frost damage to blooms in the spring but other trees can be damaged as well. When trees are in full bloom they can easily be damaged by a late cold snap similar to what we had this spring. For most of the trees the late cold snap is the reason there is no fruit however location also plays a role. Trees that were closer to a building or sidewalk that radiated heat during that cold night likely will still have fruit this year. Another cause for poor fruit set is also pollination. If there were cooler temperatures and cloudy days the bees may not have visited the trees like they normally would have which resulted in fewer fruit on the trees. The most complicated reason for a lack of fruit set on apple, pear and plums is called biennial bearing. This causes trees to have lots of flowers one year but few the next year. This issue is caused by the presence of fruit on the tree during the same time next year’s flower buds are formed. A large number of fruit one year can limit the number of fruit buds for next year. Unfortunately, there isn’t anything we can do now to have more fruit other than make sure the tree is as healthy as it can be.

Video of the week: All Shade is Not Equal
Although a plant at the garden store may be labeled for shade, it’s important to understand that there are two kinds of shade. This segment gives tips on which plants work best when competing with tree roots, or shade from your home. Watch the video here: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/all-shade-is-not-equal
Reminders-

- Prune off suckers on fruit trees as they appear.
- Prune off dead foliage from bulbs.
- Stop harvesting asparagus.
- Spray for Bagworms

Upcoming Events

- **July 5th at Noon- Solutions to Your Top Garden Insect and Disease Problems**
  Insects, diseases, and weather-related problems are always an issue in the landscape & garden. Judy O'Mara, Director of the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, and Dr. Raymond Cloyd, Extension Specialist in Horticultural Entomology, are here to help! Learn to identify and solve the plant problems you should be on the lookout for, and bring your insect & disease questions for assistance from our experts. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/)

- **July 14-18, 2022: Butler County Fair**
  Don’t forget to stop by the Fairgrounds and check out all the 4-H and other exhibits at the Butler County Fair. Check out the Open class list and bring some of your projects or produce to exhibit at the fair this year!!! For more information, including the schedule and a list of Open class exhibits check out the fair website: [https://www.butler.k-state.edu/4hfair/](https://www.butler.k-state.edu/4hfair/)

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