Bringing in Houseplants without Insects

Cooler weather has arrived and with it comes the thought of bringing your houseplants back inside for the year. The key to preventing insects from coming inside on your house plants is to start early and use a multi-pronged approach to control the insects. The first step is to inspect your plants for insects and diseases. Remove any diseased or damaged leaves and any visible insects. Discard any plants that have a severe insect or disease infestation to prevent those from spreading to other plants. The second step for me as I get my plants ready is to use a systemic granule on any plants that have been outside. This granule will slowly be taken up by the plant and provide a 2-3-month residual control for any insects that might be brought inside. I would also consider using an insecticidal spray on your plants a week or so before bringing the plants inside to kill any bugs. If you prefer to go the organic route use an insecticidal soap while permethrin or any pyrethroids are great synthetic chemicals to use. Right before you bring the plants in, I would wash them and soak the soil (only tropical plants do not soak the pot of any succulent or cacti). A strong stream of water from a garden hose will often remove most of our insect pests from the leaves and soaking the pot in warm water for 15 minutes should handle any insects in the soil.

Along with making sure we don’t bring in any hitchhikers, it is important to transition houseplants to their new light conditions. Outside plants are exposed to high levels of light, even if they are in the shade, which might not be available inside. If possible, over the period of a week, move them to areas with less light before moving them inside. Once they are inside place them in an area with as much light as possible then slowly move them to their final winter spot. If you are using artificial lights to supplement natural light you can skip the second transition when moving plants inside however, it is still important to transition them slowly outside to lower light conditions. No grow light has the same intensity of light as the sun and the plants need to get used to it. Transitioning plants to lower light levels can prevent leaf drop and yellowing, especially if you transition them slowly. This slow transition also allows you to keep an eye on your plants and take care of any insects or other critters that might have tried to join you in your house.

As houseplants get brought inside for the winter it’s very easy to over love our plants. When they were outside plants needed far more water than they do inside simply because of warmer temperatures, wind, light, etc. Once plants get moved inside it can be very easy to over water them because we have been in the habit of watering them more often outside. It’s also important to remember that many plants go into a semi dormant or even dormant period during the winter, even if under grow lights, and their care needs are going to change drastically. As the fall and winter progresses, be sure to monitor the soil moisture of your plants before you water. It gets very easy to simply get into a routine of watering on a specific day once a week or every other week which may not be what your plant really needs. Watering needs are also going to change throughout the winter because of the humidity levels in your house. Plants will dry out faster when there are lower levels of humidity so once the furnace comes on for the winter you will have to adjust your watering again. If possible run humidifiers during the winter to combat the drying effect of the furnace on the air.

I love moving my houseplants outside during the summer. Not only do they provide a lush green jungle outside but the extra light also helps them grow and bloom where they might not normally inside. With just a few steps and some care you can easily move your plants outdoors in the spring and back indoors in the fall. It is important to start early with transitioning plants inside and controlling bugs because we never know what the weather is going to do from one week to another. It’s better to be prepared rather than rushing at the last minute. Be sure to adjust your care as needed. Just follow a few steps to keep your plants happy and healthy in their new environment.
Reblooming Holiday Plants

If you kept your poinsettia or even your holiday cacti from last year it’s time to start giving them the right conditions to get them to bloom for the holidays. Both holiday plants are relatively easy to help rebloom every year and cacti will often bloom twice a year if conditions are right.

Holiday cacti and poinsettias are short day plants and require long nights in order to bloom. Provide them with 13 hours of darkness over 6-8 weeks in order to get blooms to initiate. If you want your holiday cacti to bloom for Thanksgiving or Christmas start providing those hours of darkness in late September or early October to encourage blooms. Remember to not expose the plants to light during the night time. Even five to ten minutes of light can delay bloom by weeks. One of the easiest ways to provide that darkness is cover the plants with a black plastic trash bag or a cardboard box at night and then remove it in the morning. Unlike poinsettias, there is another way to get holiday cacti to bloom. If holiday cacti have 6-8 weeks of cool night temperatures (55-65 degrees F) that will also encourage our cacti to initiate bloom buds. A cool garage, outside on a covered porch (be sure the temperatures don’t get too cold) or a basement can provide the needed temperatures to encourage bloom buds.

For holiday cacti, once you have bloom buds initiated be careful not to “shock” your plants as cool drafts, getting too dry or too little humidity can cause the plant to drop their buds. Poinsettias are a little less picky but avoid letting them get too dry. The buds for both will last longer if kept in cooler temperatures; however, they will still provide a beautiful display under most home conditions. These beautiful tropical cacti can be kept for decades, I have one in my home that is well over 100 years old right now, and provide a beautiful bloom display year after year. Poinsettias can also be kept as a houseplant for many years and will bloom reliably if given the proper care.

Liatris

Last week I talked about a purple flower I saw alongside the road and I thought I would continue that theme this week with another flower blooming in the roadside ditches now. Liatris, also known as Blazing star or Gay feather, is a native perennial of the Kansas prairie. There are several different species of this flower that are native to our area and they range in height from a foot up to five feet in height with tufts of fine, grass like leaves that are whorled around the main stem. The flowers are mostly purple but can occasionally be white and open from the top of the spike to the bottom which is unique to compared to other spike flowers. This perennial is a low maintenance plant that grows in full sun to part shade and prefers a slightly damp soil but will tolerate heat and drought. Liatris has a dense fibrous root system with corms and can slowly form small colonies via the corms but is also grown easily from seed. Use this perennial in a native pollinator garden in masses for the best use of the blooms. You can also use it singularly in a formal garden. Liatris is fairly insect and deer resistant but can have some leaf spot diseases especially if planted too closely to allow for adequate air flow. If planted in too rich of soil this native can flop over however they usually don’t require any support.
Sun Scald or Winter Injury
There have been several questions over the last few weeks about trees losing their bark along one side of the tree. If this issue shows up on the South or West side of the tree this is often caused by sun scald also known as winter injury. This issue poses a significant threat to many thin barked trees when they are young but often you might not know the damage was caused until years later. This issue is most common on maple, linden, honeylocust, cottonwood, birch, oak, peach, willow and ash. Sunscald refers to the process in which the living cells in the outer bark are damaged by the fluctuation in day to night temperatures during the winter. During the day the sun heats up the phloem and causes the sap to start to run on that side of the tree, then when the sun goes down and the temperature drops the sap freezes causing the phloem cells to burst from the expanding sap. Damage can result in discolored bark, bark cracking, sunken areas from lack of growth or the bark falling off to reveal the dead tissue within the damaged area. This damage can cause significant stress to the tree, especially during times of heat or drought, and can be a location for insects or diseases to enter the tree. Never cover the area with tar or any sealing substance as that can make things worse but you can wrap the trunk with light colored tree wrap. In many instances the damage will eventually heal however, it’s best to prevent sun scald when possible. In the fall, wrap the trunk with a light-colored tree wrap to help protect the trunk and lower branches from the temperature extremes. You can also use a plastic tree guard around the trunk to help deflect the sunlight. Wrap the tree for the first two to three winters to keep the trunk safe till the bark starts to thicken. It’s also been found that drought stressed trees tend to be more susceptible to sunscald so try to water the trees through the winter to help reduce the chances of having issues. We are getting close to time to wrap the young trees for the winter so anytime in the next few weeks would be the ideal time to protect your trees.

Video of the week: Reseeding a Lawn
Fall is a good time to reseed bald spots in your lawn planted with tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, or perennial ryegrass. However, new grass requires extra care until it becomes established. Watch the video here: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/reseeding-a-patch-of-lawn

Fall Veggie Skillet
INGREDIENTS
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 medium eggplant
- 4 tomatoes
- 1 green or red pepper
- 1 onion
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- Optional seasonings (basil, oregano)

DIRECTIONS
Cut the eggplant into cubes. Chop the tomatoes into small pieces. Cut the green pepper in half. Remove the seeds and cut it into small pieces. Chop the onion into small pieces. Cut the garlic into tiny pieces. Heat the oil and garlic in a skillet. Add vegetables and seasonings and sauté until tender. Top with Parmesan cheese and serve. Add tomatoes just before done. (Source: https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/recipes/fall-veggie-skillet)
Reminders-
- Fertilize cool season grasses if you haven’t already
- Dig gladiolus bulbs when foliage begins to turn yellow and air dry till spring
- Buy spring flowering bulbs while the selection is still good
- Harvest winter squash when the rind is hard enough it isn’t easily punctured by a fingernail

Upcoming Events
- **September 30th at 10 am - Feeding the Birds in Winter - Rose Hill Public Library**
  There is nothing more enjoyable on a cold winter day than watching the cardinals and gold finch flitting on the feeder and frolicking in the snow. While feeding the birds can be simple there are a few tips and tricks that can help you be more successful attracting birds to your feeders in the winter. Join us at the Rose Hill Public Library on September 30th at 10 am to learn more about feeding the birds and making your backyard attractive to our feathered friends this winter. This event is free and pre-registration is not required.

- **October 4th at Noon - Putting your Garden to Bed: Winter Garden Prep**
  The growing season is nearly over, but your garden work may not be done just yet. Join Anthony Reardon, West Plains District Horticulture Extension Agent, as you learn about all of the various gardening tasks that can help your landscape throughout the winter and prepare your garden for the growing season to come. 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/)

- **October 15th from Noon to 4 pm - Houseplant and Perennial Plant Swap**
  Have your houseplants grown like crazy this year and need a trim or did you divide some perennials and have extras? Bring your plants to the Plant Swap hosted by the Butler County Master Gardeners. The rules are simple: 1) Bring at least one plant, cutting or seeds to trade or sell, 2) All swaps must be labeled with plant name, 3) All plants must be pest and disease free. This event is free to attend, just bring your favorite plants to share with plant lovers in your community!!! Register so we can have enough tables: [https://forms.gle/ddB6As2f53Cf9PZa9](https://forms.gle/ddB6As2f53Cf9PZa9)

- **November 1st at Noon - Plants Gone Wild! Controlling Invasive Plants**
  Given the opportunity, certain plants can take over your landscape, woodlands, and pastures. Join Lynn Loughary, Wyandotte County Extension Horticulture Agent, as she helps you to recognize which plants you need to keep a close eye on. Learn about a few of our most invasive plants, and management strategies for their control. Discover which weeds are also regulated by law, through Kansas’s noxious weeds program. 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/)