

Thinning Excess Fruit

A few areas of Kansas have avoided late freezes resulting in a heavy fruit crop this year. At first glance, this might seem to be a good thing. But too many fruit can cause problems that should be alleviated by removing excess fruit (thinning). For example, a heavy fruit crop can interfere with fruit bud development this summer. This can result in a small to no crop next year. This problem most often appears with apples. Thus, thinning helps ensure that good crops are produced each year. The second benefit of thinning is to promote larger fruit on this year's crop. Fruit trees are limited in how many fruit they can mature. Too many fruit and fruit size and quality goes down. A third problem often caused by too many fruit is limb damage. Sometimes the weight of a maturing fruit crop can literally break branches. Thinning will help limit weight and preserve branches. So how much thinning should we do? Thinning recommendations vary with the type of tree. Guidelines for fruit spacing are as follows:

- * Apples and pears: 4 to 6 inches apart;
- * Plums and prunes: 4 to 5 inches apart;
- * Peaches: 6 to 8 inches apart;
- * Apricots: 2 to 4 inches between fruit.

These are averages and so you may have several fruit clustered closer than this distance. As long as the average on the branch is close to the recommended spacing, the fruit should size well. Cherries are not thinned and can produce a full fruit load.

Cabbage Worms

This is the time of year we normally start seeing damage from cabbage worms. The imported cabbage worm is usually the first cabbage worm species to appear and is a fuzzy, elongated green worm. Larvae come from eggs laid by the white butterfly often seen flitting around the plants.

Early control is essential to reduce injury. BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) and spinosad (Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew) are effective organic products that are labeled for this pest. BT can be found in Dipel, Thuricide and other similar materials. Direct sunlight deactivates BT quickly so it is helpful to spray late in the day or on a cloudy day. Conventional insecticides such as carbaryl (Sevin), malathion and methoxychlor are also effective but will kill natural enemies of these pests. Be sure to hit the underside of leaves where insects feed. Note that hitting the underside of leaves is easier when using a dust applied with a duster than when using a liquid spray.

Ladybird Beetles

Both the adults and the larvae of the ladybird beetle are beneficial and do not feed on plants but rather on other insects including aphids, mealybugs, whiteflies, scale insects and the eggs of various other insects. So if you see these insects, do not spray. The larval form looks like a very small alligator-shaped insect. Larvae are covered with spines, about 3/8-inch long, and black with orange markings.

Rabbits in the Garden

Rabbits in gardens are a perennial problem because of the wide variety of plants they can feed on. This time of year, they gravitate to young vegetables and flowers. But there are some vegetables that are rarely bothered including potatoes, tomatoes, corn, squash, cucumbers, and some peppers. The question is how do you protect other, more susceptible plants? Fencing provides a quick and effective control method. The fence does not need to be tall; 2 feet is sufficient for cottontails. But the mesh must be sufficiently fine (1 inch or less) so young rabbits will not be able to go through it. Support for the fence can be supplied by a number of products, but electric fence posts work well. Often fencing is not an acceptable choice because it affects the attractiveness of the garden. Another type of barrier is a floating row cover. Though most often used to promote early growth by keeping plants warmer than normal, it can also help protect young plants from insects and wildlife. Other ways to control rabbits including repellents, trapping and shooting. Repellents are often suggested for control but often do not last long and require frequent reapplication. Also, many are poisonous and cannot be used on plants or plant parts destined for human consumption. Live traps can be used to collect and move the rabbits to a rural area several miles from where they were trapped. A number of baits can be used to entice the rabbit to enter the trap including a tightly rolled cabbage leaf held together with a toothpick. However, rabbits often avoid baits if other attractive food is available. Another possibility is to use a motion-activated sprinkler. These are attached to a garden hose and release a short burst of water when motion is detected. Contech, Orbit and Havahart are suppliers and each is advertised as protecting up to at least 1,000 square feet. Shooting is another possibility when it is safe and legal to do so.

Moving Houseplants Outside for the Summer

It is often helpful to set many houseplants outside for the summer so they can recover from the low light levels endured during the winter months. As soon as night temperatures stay consistently above 55 degrees F, houseplants can be moved to their summer home. Choose a spot that has dappled shade, is protected from the wind and is close to water. A porch or a spot that receives shade from trees or buildings will work well. Putting houseplants in full sun will cause the leaves to photooxidize or sunburn because the leaves have become adapted to low light levels inside the house. Water as needed. If the potting soil is dry a half-inch deep in the pot, it is time to water.

'Staggering' Sweet Corn Planting

Sweet corn is one of those crops that is only "good" for a few days. If you want longer periods of production, consider staggering the planting. In other words, plant a small block, wait a period of time, and then plant the next block. Though it is tempting to follow a calendar schedule, such as planting a small block every week, it is better to use crop development as a trigger. If you plant on a calendar schedule, you may have noticed that later plantings often catch up with earlier ones. Instead, plant the next block of sweet corn when the previous one is one-half to one inch tall.