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# THE GRAPEVINE

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## NEW POTATOES

Many gardeners look forward to harvesting new potatoes at this time of year. New potatoes are immature and should be about the size of walnuts. Pull soil away from the base of the plants to see if the tubers are the desired size. If they are, dig entire plants and allow the skins of the exposed tubers to dry for several hours before gathering. These young potatoes are very tender and prone to the skin "slipping" unless they are given a few hours to dry. Even then these immature potatoes will not store well. Red-skinned varieties are preferred as they are the earliest to produce.

## **Grasshoppers**

Grasshopper nymphs, both longhorned (typically not a pest), and shorthorned are common and they will probably just keep increasing in density for another month or more. Another reminder that the best time to manage them is while they are still small and thus, less mobile. An application of an insecticide labeled for grasshopper control is most effective, cheaper, and less environmentally disruptive if applied in a timely manner relative to grasshopper development.

## **Look for Bagworms Now**

Most of the calls that I get on how to control bagworms come in during late July to early August when damage appears. Bagworms are difficult to control when they are that large. They are much easier to kill while small. Bagworms overwinter as eggs inside the dead female's bag. Young larvae normally hatch and emerge during mid- to late-May in Kansas. Now would be a good time to use control measures. However, make sure the bagworms are present by looking for a miniature version of the mature bagworm. Also, check to be sure the bagworms are alive before spraying. Predators and parasites can sometimes naturally control this pest.

Insecticides commonly used for controlling bagworms include: acephate (***Orthene***); permethrin (***38 Plus Turf, Termite & Ornamental Insect Spray, Eight Vegetable, Fruit & Flower Concentrate, Lawn, Garden, Pet, & Livestock Insect Spray***); cyfluthrin (***BioAdvanced Vegetable and Garden Insect spray***); bifenthrin (***Bug Blaster II, Bug-B-Gon Max Lawn and Garden Insect Killer***); lambda-cyhalothrin (***Spectracide Triazicide, Bonide Caterpillar Killer***); spinosad (***Conserve, Natural Guard Spinosad, and Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew***). Spinosad is an organic control that is very effective on this pest. Thorough spray coverage of foliage is essential for good control with any of these products. That generally means a high pressure spray that will penetrate the canopy of whatever you are spraying. Controls applied within the next three weeks should be over 90% effective.

## ***Jumping Oak Galls***

There have been reports of jumping oak galls. Leaves of the white oak family show small spots or bumps that eventually fall out and leave a hole about the size of the head of a pin. The fallen galls attract attention by jumping an inch or more due to the action of the larva inside the gall. Jumping oak galls are caused by a very small, stingless wasp that lays eggs on developing oak leaf buds early in the spring. It is one of over 100 oak leaf galls that can affect our oaks. The larva that hatches from the egg will start to feed and juices from the saliva will cause the gall to form. The larva will feed inside the gall which offers a measure of protection. The galls are quite small; about the size of a pinhead. The gall eventually drops out of the leaf and falls to the ground. The galls will then jump due to movement of the larva inside the gall. This helps the insect move into the litter under the tree or into cracks in the soil where the insect will eventually pupate and overwinter. The mature wasp will chew its way out of the gall the next spring to start the cycle over again. White oaks and members of the white oak family, such as Burr Oak, Chinquapin Oak, Post Oak and English Oak can be affected. Though heavy infestations can cause leaves to brown (or turn black), curl and possibly drop, otherwise healthy trees are not appreciably harmed. Even if it were more serious, it is too late to treat by the time symptoms are seen. Often natural controls prevent damage in subsequent years. Keep trees healthy by watering during dry weather.

## ***After-Effects of Too Much Rain***

Many areas of Butler County have had saturated or near-saturated soils for several weeks now. It is not hard to figure out why - historic rainfall amounts throughout our area of Kansas. Gardeners are likely to assume that watering won't be needed for quite some time after dry weather arrives due to such high soil moisture levels. Actually, watering may be needed much sooner than you expect. Excessive rain can drive oxygen out of the soil and literally drown roots. When the surface of the soil around your plants is dry enough to work without clodding up too bad, do some light cultivation where you can. Only work the soil about an inch or two deep, this will help the root system exchange gasses. As we enter hotter, drier weather, the plants with damaged root systems from being too wet may be very susceptible to a lack of water. Don't forget to check your plants for signs of wilting or leaf scorching and water as needed. A light watering may be helpful the first week of hot weather, but after that if irrigation is called for, water deeply and infrequently. Usually once per week is sufficient depending on the weather. Soil should be moist but not waterlogged.

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