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THE GRAPEVINE

June 25th, 2020

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PULLING ONIONS

Onions are ready to harvest when about half the plants have tops that have fallen over. This is a sign that the onions are mature and need to be pulled out of the ground. Bulbs may sunburn without the foliage to protect them. The secret to onions keeping well is to allow the tops to dry completely before storage. This may take 2 to 3 weeks. Large-necked onions take more time to dry than small-necked onions such as Bermuda types. Move onions to a shaded, well-ventilated area after harvest and spread them out. After tops are completely dry, remove the dry foliage and compost. Store the bulbs in a cool, dry location. Avoid storage in plastic bags because the lack of air circulation will shorten storage life. Use an open, mesh bag instead.

Raccoons and Sweet Corn

It seems the official sweet corn inspector should be the raccoon as they seem to harvest the sweet corn the day before it is to be picked. The only effective control measure I have had success with is fencing; either electric or kennel fencing. First are some suggestions for electric fencing. Other designs may very well work but this is what has worked in my garden.

- Two or more wires must be used. Place the first about 5 inches above the ground and the second 4 inches above the first (or 9 inches above ground). Raccoons must not be able to crawl under, go between or go over the wires without being shocked.

- Fence posts used for electric fences work well for this application (go figure), as do the insulators used to support the electric wire.

- It is much easier to use the woven electric wire with strands of wire embedded than to use a solid metal wire.

The woven wire is easier to bend around corners and to roll up when done for the year.

- Though both the plug-in and battery operated fencers work, the battery operated types allow more versatility in where corn is grown. One set of batteries is usually sufficient for the season. In my case, I pull the battery out of an old tractor that is not used often. It will also last the season if fully charged at the beginning. My fencer is probably on for a total of a month.

- Start the charger before the corn is close to being ripe. Once raccoons get a taste of the corn, they are more difficult to discourage.

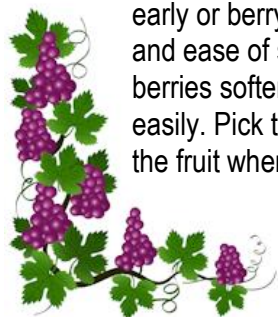
- Control weeds near the wire. Weeds can intercept the voltage if they touch a wire and allow raccoons entry beyond the weed.



- Check the wire occasionally to make sure you have current. This can be done easily (but unpleasantly) by touching the wire. There are also tools that will measure the voltage available for sale. They are worth the money.

As mentioned earlier, kennel fencing can also be used. Tie the panels together well enough that raccoons can't squeeze through corners. A covering over the top may be needed if the raccoons figure out how to climb the panels. Welded garden fence can work well for this.

When to Pick Blackberries

The exact time to harvest blackberries varies by cultivar, with thorny blackberries normally ripening earlier than thornless types. But there are some general guidelines to keep in mind when harvesting blackberries. Do not pick blackberries too early or berry size and flavor will be sacrificed. Two major characteristics determining maturity for harvest are fruit color and ease of separation. Blackberries usually develop a dull, black color with plump, juicy fruitlets as they ripen. The berries soften and produce the characteristic blackberry flavor. Full color often develops before the berries separate easily. Pick the berries by gently lifting with the thumb and fingers. The receptacle, or center part of the fruit, remains in the fruit when blackberries are harvested, unlike raspberries, which leave the receptacle on the bush. Take care not to





crush the berries or expose them to the hot sun. When possible, avoid picking berries when they are wet. They'll likely need picking every second or third day. Cool the berries immediately after harvest to extend shelf life. Keep refrigerated under high relative humidity and use within 3 to 5 days.



Dutch Elm Disease (DED)

People often assume that all of our American Elms have been killed by Dutch elm disease. Fortunately, such is not the case. Though many have survived thus far, the number diminishes each year. We are still seeing examples of Dutch elm disease on American elms. Though American elms are the species often associated with this disease, red and some hybrid elms are also susceptible. Siberian elm (sometimes referred to as Chinese elm) and the true Chinese elm (Lacebark elm) are considered resistant but not immune to the disease. However, we do have true American Elms that are naturally resistant. Early diagnosis can help save recently infected trees. Look for branches with leaves that have wilted and suddenly turned yellow to brown. Remove a portion of the branch and peel back an area of the bark. If you notice brown streaking in the sapwood, you may have Dutch elm disease. Healthy bark is more cream-colored and the streaking is absent. Suspect wood should be submitted to the diagnostic lab and control measures started immediately. Dutch elm disease can often be controlled through the use of systemic fungicide injections, judicious pruning of affected trees and removal of nearby diseased elms. However, trees infected through root grafts with nearby infected elms or those in which the disease has reached the main stem cannot be saved. Therefore, preventative measures have a better chance of success and are preferred. Fungicides labeled for Dutch elm disease include Arbotect and Alamo. The Arbotect fungicide is preferred because it is the most persistent with a three-year interval between injections. Alamo may need to be applied every year in high risk areas with high value trees. A trained arborist should administer injections. These treatments are quite expensive. Check with your local arborist for current prices.

Squash Vine Borer

If you have squash or related plants that suddenly wilt and die, you may have squash vine borer. This insect will bore into the stems of squash, zucchini, pumpkins and gourds. Zucchini squash are a favorite. Cucumbers and melons are usually not a target, although both can be affected by a disease that causes similar symptoms, known as bacterial wilt. The adult of this insect is a clear-winged moth that resembles a wasp. The forewings are a dark metallic green but the rear wings are clear. The abdomen is orange with black spots. The larva is cream-colored and rather wrinkled. Adults emerge in the spring and lay eggs on or near susceptible plants. Eggs are deposited singly on the underside of the vines and are often concentrated at the base of the plants. Larva bore into the plant and feed for about a month as they move toward the base. Mature larva will exit the plant, burrow into the soil and pupate where they remain until the next year. Each plant can have numerous borers. If you suspect squash vine borer, split the stem of a collapsed plant near where it enters the ground. Infested plants will be hollowed out and mushy and may contain borers. Unfortunately, there isn't much you can do at this late stage. Control measures should center on prevention. Suggested preventative controls would include crushing the dull red eggs before they hatch, excavating larvae from stems before they cause much damage or using insecticide applications. Applications should begin when the vines begin to run (too late for that) and reapplied every seven to 10 days through the end of June. Direct the spray at the crown of the plant and the base of runners. Chemicals used for borer control in gardens are permethrin (Eight Vegetable, Fruit & Flower Concentrate; Lawn, Garden, Pet and Livestock Insect Control; Lawn & Garden Insect Killer) or bifenthrin (Hi-Yield Bug Blaster II, Bug-B-Gon Insect Killer for Lawns & Gardens) applied as sprays or dusts. If plants wilt, look for the presence of holes and ooze. However, in extreme heat, these plants will temporarily wilt in the afternoon even if undamaged by this insect.

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