

Horticulture 2017 Newsletter

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Video of the Week: [Controlling Bagworms](#)

VEGETABLES

Do Not Over-Fertilize Tomatoes



Though tomatoes need to be fertilized to yield well, too much nitrogen can result in large plants with little to no fruit. Tomatoes should be fertilized before planting and sidedressed with a nitrogen fertilizer three times during the season.

The first sidedressing should go down one to two weeks before the first tomato ripens. The second should be applied two weeks after the first tomato ripens and the third one month after the second. Common sources of nitrogen-only fertilizers include nitrate of soda, urea, and ammonium sulfate. Blood meal is an organic fertilizer that contains primarily, but not exclusively, nitrogen. Use only one of the listed fertilizers and apply at the rate given below.

Nitrate of soda (16-0-0): Apply 2/3 pound (1.5 cups) fertilizer per 30 feet of row.

Blood Meal (12-1.5-.6): Apply 14 ounces (1.75 cups) fertilizer per 30 feet of row.

Urea (46-0-0): Apply 4 ounces (1/2 cup) fertilizer per 30 feet of row.

Ammonium Sulfate (21-0-0): Apply 0.5 pounds (1 cup) fertilizer per 30 feet of row.

If you cannot find the above materials, you can use a lawn fertilizer that is about 30 percent nitrogen (nitrogen is the first number in the set of three) and apply it at the rate of 1/3 pound (3/4 cup) per 30 feet of row. Do not use a fertilizer that contains a weed killer or weed preventer.
(Ward Upham)

Mulching Garden Crops



Now is a good time to mulch garden vegetables if you haven't done so already. Mulches provide several benefits including weed prevention, reduced watering due to less evaporation and cooler soils that enhance root growth. Straw and hay are popular mulches in Kansas due to their availability. However, both may contain weed seeds that will germinate if the thatch layer is not thick enough. Grass clippings can also be used if the lawn has not been treated with weed killers. Add only a thin layer of clippings at a time and allow to

dry for 2 to 3 days before adding more. A thick layer will form a mold that is almost impervious to water. A mulch layer one-half to three-quarters inch thick is about right for grass clippings but hay or straw should be at a depth of 2 to 4 inches. (Ward Upham)

New Potatoes



Many gardeners look forward to harvesting new potatoes 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 often preferred as they are the earliest to produce. (Ward Upham)

FRUIT

Strawberry Bed Renewal



Next year's strawberry crop will be affected by what you do to this year's strawberry bed. The sooner after harvest the patch is cleaned up, fertilized and irrigated, if possible, the better the chance of getting a good crop next year.

One of the main goals in renovation is to provide a high level of sunlight to plant leaves so they can manufacture the food the plant needs. If leaves have disease spots, remove all the leaves in the bed. Removing these diseased leaves and weeds will cause new, non-diseased leaves to develop and remove competition from weedy plants. Hedge shears or even a mower can be used. Be sure the mower blade is high enough to avoid the strawberry crowns.

It is also important to reduce the number of strawberry plants so they do not compete for light, moisture and nutrients. If you have a small bed, you can hoe out or pull some plants so they are spaced about 4 to 6 inches apart. On large beds, adjust a rototiller so you can till between the rows, and cut each row back to about 10 inches wide.

The next step is to fertilize the plants with about 3/4 to 1 pound (3 to 4 cups) of a complete fertilizer such as 13-13-13 (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) or an equivalent on each 25 feet of row. If a soil test shows adequate levels of phosphorus and potassium, use 3/4 pound (1.5

cups) of a 16-0-0 (nitrate of soda) fertilizer per 25 feet of row instead. If nitrate of soda is unavailable, use the lawn fertilizer that contains about 30% nitrogen such as a 30-0-3, 28-0-3 or something similar. Make sure the lawn fertilizer does not contain a weed killer or preventer. These fertilizers should be used at the rate of 3/4 cup per 25 feet of row. The next step is to irrigate to wash the fertilizer into the soil and provide moisture for the rapid growth of the strawberry plants. When the soil is dry, apply about 1 inch of water. A garden sprinkler can do a good job applying the water.

Controlling weeds and watering throughout the summer are important so plants are vigorous when fruit buds begin to develop in September and October. (Ward Upham)

Fruit Reminders



A winter cold snap, late frosts and hail have damaged some of our fruit crops this year. However, some of the following tips apply to trees or vines even if they won't have fruit.

* Remove some fruit from heavily loaded apples and peaches (if the flower buds weren't killed by frost or winter cold) to improve fruit size and prevent limbs from breaking. Apples should be spaced every 4 inches and peaches every 6 to 8. Note that is an average spacing. Two fruit can be closer together if the average is correct.

* Remove sucker growth from the base of fruit trees and grape vines.

* Remove water sprout growth from fruit trees. Water sprouts grow straight up from existing branches.

* "Comb" new growth on grape vines so these new shoots hang down for greater exposure to sunlight.

* Continue disease and insect control to prevent fruit damage. (Ward Upham)

PESTS

Slugs



We have had several reports of slug damage; likely due to all the wet weather. Slugs, like snails, are mollusks and are related to snails, clams and oysters. Slugs are like a snail minus the shell. The most common slug in the

Midwest is the gray garden slug and is about 3/4 to 1.5 inches long. Color varies but can include brown, purple, lavender or a pale yellow.

Slugs feed on a wide variety of plants including flowers (annuals and perennials), vegetables and ground covers. They are especially fond of hostas. They can devour seedlings completely and cause large holes or tattered edges on larger leaves. Damage occurs at night as these organisms are nocturnal and hide during the day.

A number of strategies can be used for control. Handpicking can be effective but is most effective if done after dark with a flashlight. Alternatively, rolled newspapers or boards placed near where slugs are feeding will serve as a hiding place for slugs during the day. Check the traps in the morning and destroy any that are found. Placing slugs in a jar with soapy water will kill them. Other, more entertaining methods of control can be used such as stomping on them, placing them on concrete and running them over with a vehicle or bicycle or even sprinkling them with salt to draw water out of the slug, leading to its' demise.

Baits can also be used. Gardeners have found that a pie tin, buried to the rim and filled with beer will attract and kill slugs as they crawl in and either cannot or will not crawl out. Commercial baits are also available with the most common active ingredients being metaldehyde and iron phosphate. Products with metaldehyde can be toxic to cats and dogs if ingested in large quantities so place this product in spots the slugs can reach but pets cannot. Iron phosphate is safe for pets and also does a good job of killing slugs though it may take 3 to 6 days to work. (Ward Upham)

MISCELLANEOUS

Slime Molds



Slime molds are primitive organisms that are common on turf and mulch. Slime molds are not fungi and are no longer classified as such. They belong to the Kingdom Protista rather than Kingdom Fungi. On turf, you might often see large numbers of small gray, white or purple fruiting structures, called sporangia on leaf blades during cool and humid weather throughout spring, summer, and fall. Affected areas are often several inches to 1 foot in diameter. During wet weather, the fruiting structures may appear slimy. As the structures dry out in hot weather, they become ash gray and break up easily when touched.



Homeowners often are concerned that this is a disease organism that will kill the grass, but slime mold feeds on bacteria, other fungi, and dead organic matter. It simply

uses the turf as a structure on which to grow. However, slime mold can damage turf by completely covering leaf blades and interfering with photosynthesis. Chemical control of slime molds is not necessary. Use a broom or a heavy spray of water to dislodge the mold.

Slime molds on mulch often attract attention because of their bright colors and disgusting appearance. Common names are often quite descriptive. For example, the "dog vomit" slime mold is a bright, whitish color that resembles its namesake. It eventually turns brown and then into a hard, white mass. There is also the "scrambled egg" slime mold, "the yellow blob" slime mold and the "regurgitated cat breakfast" slime mold. Slime molds do not hurt anything, but most people do not find them attractive and want to get rid of them. Simply use a shovel to discard the offensive organism and then stir up the mulch for aeration. (Ward Upham)

Contributors: Ward Upham, Extension Associate To view Upcoming Events: <http://hnr.k-state.edu/events/index.html>

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