Thinning Excess Fruit

Many 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. However, too many fruit can cause problems that should be alleviated with thinning. For example, a heavy fruit crop can soak up so much energy that little is left for fruit bud development. This can result in a small 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 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;
- **Peaches:** 4 to 8 inches apart;
- **Plums and prunes:** 4 to 5 inches apart; and
- **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. (WU)
VEGETABLES

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. However, 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. 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. There are 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. Shooting is another possibility when it is safe and legal to do so. (WU)

Storm Damage and the Garden

Various parts of the state have had high winds, excessive rainfall and hail. This column deals with what can be done to help our gardens recover.

**Heavy rain:** The force of rainfall pounding on the soil can result in a thick crust that prevents seed emergence and partially blocks oxygen from reaching roots. A light scraping after the soil surface has dried is all that is needed to correct these problems. Be careful of deep tilling as it may damage young, tender roots.

**Standing water:** Standing water cuts off oxygen to the roots, which can result in plant damage if it doesn’t drain quickly enough. Most plants can withstand 24 hours of standing water without harm. Hot, sunny weather can make a bad situation worse by the water becoming hot enough to “cook” the plants. There isn’t much that can be done about this unless a channel can be cut to allow the water to drain.
**Hail damage:** Plants should recover quickly as long as the leaves only were damaged by the hail as leaves regenerate quickly. The situation becomes much more serious if the stems and fruit were damaged. The plant can recover from a few bruises but if it looks like the plants were mowed down by a weed whip, replanting is in order.

**Leaning plants:** Either wind or water can cause plants to lean. They should start to straighten after a few days. Don’t try to bend them back as they often break easily. (WU)

### PESTS

#### Oak Galls

A number of tiny non-stinging wasps, mites and flies cause abnormal growths to develop on the leaves, twigs or branches of oak trees. These galls can include growths that are round, spiny, flattened, elongated or star-shaped. There are hundreds of different types of galls, each of which is caused by a specific insect. Galls form in response to a chemical that the insect injects into the plant tissue. Eggs laid by a mature female hatch into legless grubs around which the gall forms. The larvae feed, develop, and pupate inside these galls. Adults may emerge either the same season or may overwinter inside the gall depending on the life history of that specific insect.

Generally, these gall insects do not cause significant damage to their hosts, though some of the leaf galls can cause enough deformity to make a tree unsightly. Also, severe infestations of twig galls can cause twig dieback or, rarely, tree death. However, just because a twig is covered with galls does not mean it is dead. I have seen twigs that looked like a solid mass of galls leaf out in the spring.

Insecticide sprays applied when galls are noticed are ineffective because damage has already occurred. Also, larvae are unaffected because of the protection afforded by the gall. Insecticide sprays can kill emerging adult wasps and flies, but long periods of emergence and short residuals of most contact insecticides make this impractical. Stem and twig galls can be pruned if deemed to be practical and necessary. In short, this is a problem that is best ignored unless pruning is done to improve the appearance of the tree. (WU)

#### Maple Bladder Gall Mite

Bright red bladder-shaped growths on the top of maple leaves are evidence of the Maple Bladder Gall mite. Adult mites that have overwintered beneath bark and bud scales on host trees move to newly developing leaves and begin feeding. The pouch like galls develop in response to this
feeding activity. Initially, the galls are green but gradually turn red and then black. Adults deposit eggs in the galls as they feed. Eventually, the adults and their progeny will leave the gall in search of newly forming leaves so that they may continue the cycle. Mite activities drop off as summer heat arrives.

The galls may be unsightly but do not damage the maple trees. Therefore, the need for control is questionable. Also, spraying must start before the galls are formed to be effective.

If control is still desired, use a dormant spray before the leaves open in the spring. Alternatively, use the insecticidal soaps as the first leaves are unfurling with a follow-up treatment 10 days later. (WU)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**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. Where possible, sink the pots into the ground to help moderate root temperatures and reduce watering frequency.

If you have a number of plants, dig a trench 6 to 8 inches deep (or deeper if you have larger pots) and long enough to accommodate all of your plants without crowding. Place peat moss under and around the pots. Peat moss holds water, helps keep the pots cool and reduces evaporation from clay pots. About every two weeks, rotate the pots a quarter turn to break off any roots that have penetrated the peat moss surrounding the pot and to equalize the light received on all sides of the pot. Water as needed. If the potting soil is dry a half-inch deep in the pot, it is time to water. (WU)

**New Organic Production Guides Available from Cornell University**

Guides are now available on how to produce certified organic apples, blueberries, grapes, lettuce, potatoes, spinach, strawberries and cole crops (broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower). These guides are quite extensive and complete. For example, the apple guide has over 60 pages covering site selection, rootstock and cultivar selection, soil fertility and crop nutrient management, groundcover and weed management, crop-load management, pesticide regulations and safety, integrated pest management, insect pests and insecticides, diseases and disease control, wildlife
management, harvest and postharvest handling, and production costs and marketing. Though written for commercial producers, homeowners would find much of this information very valuable. The guides are available as PDF’s at
http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu/organic_guide/default.asp . (WU)

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To view Upcoming Events: http://tinyurl.com/fswqe

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