Horticulture 2013 Newsletter  
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Video of the Week:  Tomato Problems, Part 2

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Kansas Turf & Ornamentals Field Day will be held Thursday, August 1 at John C. Pair Horticulture Research Center in Haysville. This will be a great time to see current research, talk to the experts, and get answers to your questions. Exhibitors will be displaying their latest products and equipment. The program also qualifies for 1 pesticide recertification credit hr in both 3A and 3B and .25 GCSAA education points. You can register online at http://store.kansasturfgrassfoundation.org by July 30.

VEGETABLES

How to Pick a Ripe Melon

Telling when a melon is ready to be harvested can be a challenge, or it may be quite easy. It all depends on the type of melon. Let’s start with the easy one. Muskmelons are one of those crops that tell you when they are ready to be picked. This can help you not only harvest melons at the correct time but also choose good melons when shopping. As a melon ripens, a layer of cells around the stem softens so the melon detaches easily from the vine. This is called “slipping” and will leave a dish-shaped scar at the point of stem attachment. When harvesting melons, put a little pressure where the vine attaches to the fruit. If ripe, it will release or “slip.”

When choosing a melon from those that have already been harvested, look for a clean,
dish-shaped scar. Also, ripe melons have a pleasant, musky aroma if the melons are at room temperature (not refrigerated).

Watermelons can be more difficult and growers often use several techniques to tell when to harvest.

1. Look for the tendril that attaches at the same point as the melon to dry and turn brown. On some varieties this will need to be completely dried before the watermelon is ripe. On others it will only need to be in the process of turning brown.

2. The surface of a ripening melon develops a surface roughness (sometimes called “sugar bumps”) near the base of the fruit.

3. Ripe watermelons normally develop a yellow color on the “ground spot” when ripe. This is the area of the melon that contacts the ground.

Honeydew melons are the most difficult to tell when they are ripe because they do not “slip” like muskmelons. Actually, there is one variety that does slip called Earlidew, but it is the exception to the rule. Ripe honeydew melons become soft on the flower end of the fruit. The “flower end” is the end opposite where the stem attaches. Also, honeydews should change to a light or yellowish color when ripe, but this varies with variety. (Ward Upham)

**PESTS**

**Budworms on Garden Plants**

If you have noticed a small hole in the buds of some of your flowers, you may have tobacco (geranium) budworm (Helicoverpa virescens). Though a number of flowers can serve as hosts, geraniums and petunias are most commonly attacked. The larva of this insect damages the buds by boring into them before they open. The caterpillars feed on the flowers for about a month and then drop to the soil to pupate. There are normally two generations per year, with the second causing the most harm. The striped caterpillars vary widely in color with green, red, light brown and dark forms possible. The color of the larva is related to the color of the flowers on which they feed. The adult of this insect is a moth.

Damaged buds often fail to open. Those that do will show evidence of feeding on the petals. Damage normally peaks in late summer because of increased numbers from the second generation.

Control of the budworm is difficult. Handpicking at dusk can be effective on small plantings. For larger plantings, chemical control may be the only practical option. Look for products with
synthetic pyrethroid active ingredients such as permethrin, esfenvalerate, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin, lambda-cyhalothrin or related compounds. Spinosad (Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew) is also recommended.

Severe winters can be a natural form of control from one year to the next. Temperatures below 20 degrees F are hard enough to kill overwintering pupa. Because pupal cases are usually 2 to 6 inches deep, most exposed areas in Kansas will provide good control during a cold winter. Microclimates next to heated buildings may allow survival. (Ward Upham)

Green June Beetle

These large beetles feed on sweet corn, blackberries, and peaches. They look much like the common May beetle, or June bug, but have a dull, velvety green color. The underside is more of an iridescent green. These beetles have poor navigational skills and seem to fly until they hit something. They also make a buzzing sound somewhat like a bumblebee. Unfortunately, they are also about the size of a bumblebee and so cause concern for many gardeners even though they cannot harm people. As noted above, they may damage crops.

A number of general-use insecticides, including Sevin and malathion, may be used to discourage feeding. Sevin has a two-day waiting period between spraying and harvest on sweet corn and a three-day waiting period on peaches. There is a seven-day waiting period for Sevin on blackberries, so malathion, with a one-day waiting period, may be a better choice. (Ward Upham)

Stink Bugs on Tomatoes, Part 2

We mentioned stink bugs on tomatoes in an earlier newsletter (July 9) and noted that they cause whiteish to cloudy spots on the tomato as well as spots of a hard, whitish, callous tissue under the skin. What we have been seeing recently is a whitish layer forming under the skin. This is due to heavy feeding causing individual calloused areas to coalesce and form a layer. Tomatoes affected in this way are safe to eat.

Stink bugs may be long gone but, if not, cyfluthrin (Bayer Vegetable & Garden Insect Spray) will not only control stink bugs but also tomato hornworms and blister beetles. It has a 0-day waiting period on tomatoes. (Ward Upham)
Cicada Killer Wasps

These large (1 1/3 to 1 5/8-inch long) wasps fly slowly above the ground. Cicada killers have a black body with yellow marks across the thorax and abdomen. Wings are reddish-orange. Although these wasps are huge, they usually ignore people. Males may act aggressively if they are threatened, but are unable to sting. Females can sting, but are so passive that they rarely do. Even if they do sting, the pain is less than that of smaller wasps such as the yellow jacket or paper wasp and is similar to the sting of a sweat bee. The cicada killer is a solitary wasp rather than a social wasp like the yellow jacket. The female nests in burrows in the ground. These burrows are quarter-size in diameter and can go 6 inches straight down and another 6 inches horizontally. Adults normally live 60 to 75 days from mid-July to mid-September and feed on flower nectar and sap. The adult female seeks cicadas on the trunks and lower limbs of trees. She stings her prey, flips it over, straddles it and carries it to her burrow. If she has a tree to climb, she will fly with it. If not, she will drag it. She will lay one egg per cicada if the egg is left unfertilized. Unfertilized eggs develop into males only. Fertilized eggs develop into females and are given at least two cicadas. Cicadas are then stuffed into the female’s burrow. Each burrow normally has three to four cells with one to two cicadas in each. However, it is possible for one burrow to have 10 to 20 cells. Eggs hatch in two to three days, and larvae begin feeding on paralyzed cicadas.

Feeding continues for four to 10 days until only the outer shell of the cicada remains. The larva overwinters inside a silken case. Pupation occurs in the spring. There is one generation per year.

Cicada killers are not dangerous, but they can be a nuisance. If you believe control is necessary, treat the burrows after dark to ensure the female wasps are in their nests. The males normally roost on plants near burrow sites. They can be captured with an insect net or knocked out of the air with a tennis racket during the day. Carbaryl (Sevin) or permethrin may be used for control. (Ward Upham)

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