

Horticulture 2012 Newsletter

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Video of the Week: [Check Your Garden for Insects](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wildflower Walk at Konza Prairie - June 3



The Friends of Konza Prairie invite you to see and identify wildflowers of the tallgrass prairie.

On Sunday, June 3 at 6:30 p.m., the general public has an opportunity to visit areas normally not open to the public and walk a trail rich with wildflowers. Trained docents will be available to enable easy identification of the wildflowers. This event is a fundraiser for the Konza Environmental Education Program, so we ask for donations of \$10 per person and \$2 per child.

Come join for us for a stroll through the prairie and our native wildflowers. To accommodate all visitors with docents, we do ask for reservations. Please call 785-587-0441 before May 31.

VEGETABLES

Mulching Tomatoes



Soils are warm enough now that tomatoes can benefit from mulching. Tomatoes prefer even levels of soil moisture and mulches provide such by preventing excessive evaporation. Other benefits of mulching include weed suppression, moderating soil temperatures and preventing the formation of a hard crust on the soil. Crusted soils restrict air movement into and out of the soil and slow the water infiltration rate.

Hay and straw mulches are very popular for tomatoes but may contain weed or volunteer grain seeds. Grass clippings can also be used but should be applied as a relatively thin layer – only 2 to 3 inches thick. Clippings should also be dry as wet clipping can mold and become so hard that water can't pass through. Also, do not use clippings from lawns that have been treated with a weed killer until some time has passed. With most types of weed killers, clippings from the fourth mowing after treatment may be used. If the lawn was treated with a product containing quinclorac (Drive), the clippings should not be used as mulch. (WU)

TURFGRASS

Control of Prostrate Spurge



Prostrate spurge is one of the more difficult broadleaf weeds to control. It is a summer annual that must come up from seed every year. If caught when young, it is easier, though still difficult, to control. Correct herbicide selection is important. Mature plants are almost impossible to control, even with selected herbicides.

Several years ago K-State Research and Extension conducted a study on the phytotoxic effects of certain herbicides on buffalograss. During the application, we noted the presence of a large number of small prostrate spurge plants. As the study progressed, plots were rated for percent control of spurge. The results were interesting. We found that Drive (quinclorac) provided more than 90 percent control. Until recently, Drive was only available to commercial applicators. Now homeowners have additional products that contain Drive. Those products are listed below.

Ortho Weed-B-Gon Max + Crabgrass Control
Bayer All-in-One Lawn Weed and Crabgrass Killer.
Drive in Monterey Lawn and Garden Fertilome Weed Out with Q
Trimec Crabgrass Plus Lawn Weed Killer
Bonide Weed Beater Plus Crabgrass & Broadleaf Weed Killer
Spectracide Weed Stop for Lawns Plus Crabgrass Killer

If you choose to use any of the above products, do not compost clippings or use them as mulch. The quinclorac can harm certain broadleaf plants. Clippings should be returned to the lawn or discarded.

Dimension and Turflon Ester offered more than 80 percent control, and Trimec 78 percent. Dimension results were surprising because it is a preemergence herbicide with some postemergence activity that is commonly used for crabgrass control. Turflon Ester should only be used on cool-season grass such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass; not on warm-season grasses such as bermuda, zoysia or buffalo. (WU)

PESTS

Aphids on Daylilies



We have a bed of daylilies at one of the entrances to our building that has had a very high aphid infestation at the base of the plants. What we found interesting was we also found a large population of ladybug beetles and larvae.

Most people are familiar with ladybug adults. However, ladybug larvae look very different from the adults and resemble very small alligator-shaped insects. The larvae are covered with spines, about 3/8 inch long, and black with orange markings. Neither the adults nor larvae will feed on the daylilies but rather on the aphids. Therefore, in our case, there is no need to control the aphids because the ladybugs will decimate the aphid population.

Daylilies with browning foliage should be checked for aphids. If aphids are present, look for ladybugs. The presence of ladybugs means there is no need to try to control the aphids. The ladybugs will do that for you.

Remember that drought can also cause daylily foliage to brown. (WU)

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. Mature females lay eggs that hatch into legless grubs. Galls form around them. 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)

Chinch Bugs on Buffalograss



We are seeing a number of buffalograss turf samples showing signs of decline. Most of these were damaged by high chinch bug populations last year. We received our first report of actively feeding chinch bug nymphs this spring in the Post Rock District last week.

Adult field chinch bugs are black with distinctly black-and-white patterned wings. Some adult buffalograss chinch bugs have only rudimentary wings and appear black. Nymphs of both types are red with a white waistband.

Adult field chinch bugs overwinter in bunch grasses, and buffalograss chinch bugs overwinter in buffalograss. Eggs are deposited in the spring. Nymphs begin feeding immediately after they emerge. A second generation is produced later in the summer. Second-generation adults overwinter.

Yellow or brown lawn areas indicate a problem. Damage occurs in sunny areas. Chinch bugs feed on grass near the soil or just beneath the surface. High populations of tiny red or larger, dark-colored nymphs or adult chinch bugs indicate the possible cause of grass discoloration and dead spots.

Normally, 20 chinch bugs per square foot is considered enough to warrant treatment. The University of Nebraska tested a number of insecticides and found that carbaryl (Sevin) or bifenthrin applied in 3 to 5 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet provided up to 95 percent reduction of chinch bugs. Bifenthrin can also be found in Hi-Yield Bug Blaster II, Hi-Yield Bug Blaster Bifenthrin, and Ortho Lawn Insect Killer Granules. After applying insecticide, water enough (1/8 to 1/4 inch) to move it into the thatch layer where most of the bugs are found. Do not apply more than a quarter-inch of water to prevent leaching the insecticide down below the zone occupied by the bugs. Follow label directions to determine dilution and application rates. Do not reenter the area until the grass has dried. (WU)

Burrowing Bug Nymphs



There have been several reports of white-margined burrowing bug nymphs, *Sehirus cinctus*, over the past few weeks (see photos). These little bugs are showing up in gardens, around compost piles, and in field crops (especially those with reduced tillage), often in rather large congregations. These bugs overwinter as adults, mate in the spring, and lay eggs in holes in the soil which usually hatch in mid-May. They are very secretive but live and feed primarily above ground. They are especially abundant on henbit and other mints and nettles in late spring as they feed on the developing seeds from these plants. While these insects often cause concern for growers and homeowners alike they are not harmful and will not damage plants and crops of interest. (HD & JW)

ORNAMENTALS

Inexpensive Method of Watering Trees



We mentioned last week about using a soaker hose to water trees. We thought it might be helpful to provide more details.

Soaker hoses are notorious for non-uniform watering. In other words, you often receive too much water from one part of the hose and not enough from another. Hooking both the beginning and the end of the soaker hose to a Y-adapter helps equalize the pressure and therefore provide a more uniform watering. The specific parts you need are

shown in the photo above and include the soaker hose, Y-adapter and female to female connector. It is also helpful if the Y-adapter has shut off valves so the volume of flow can be controlled. Too high a flow rate can allow water to run off rather than soak in.

On larger trees, the soaker hose can circle the trunk at a distance within the dripline of the tree but at least $\frac{1}{2}$ the distance to the dripline. The dripline of the tree is outermost reach of the branches.

On smaller trees, you may circle the tree several times so that only soil which has tree roots will be watered. (WU)

MISCELLANEOUS

Honey Bee Swarm Season

Swarm season is here! 2012 is looking like a great swarm year for many beekeepers who have been busy answering calls during the last two-to-three weeks.

One reason honey bee swarms occur is when the bee colony increases in size and is in need of more space. There are other triggers such as food and water supply, but this year has been good for pollen and nectar due to the unusually warm spring. A swarm is a loose group of honey bees consisting of 30% to 70% of the hive it has left including workers, drones and the queen; usually found hanging on tree limbs, eaves of homes, rails or other objects. By nature, swarms are usually not a threat since these honey bees do not have a hive or food to defend and are looking for a new place to relocate to. These bees can cause a source of panic for some and may even be considered an emergency if near an area where a person who is allergic needs to live or work. The key is to stay calm, and do not disturb the swarm. Instead, people who find swarms should try to contact a beekeeper to remove the bees.



Many beekeepers welcome the opportunity to increase the number of colonies they have by catching these swarms and giving them a new home in a hive. A list of beekeepers who want swarm calls can be found at <http://www.entomology.ksu.edu/p.aspx?tabid=687> . In addition to these names which have given us permission to list them on the KSU Entomology website, there is a list from the Kansas Honey Producer's Association (KHPA), or I can put homeowners in contact with members of KHPA. Several beekeepers are also registered with local police and fire departments for swarm catching. While some beekeepers are willing to collect swarms for free, others may charge mileage or removal fees. Homeowners will need to work with the beekeeper and should ask if there is a fee associated with bee removal.

Some swarms eventually make their way into unwanted areas such as under house siding or in tree holes. Honey bees which make their hives in these settings are more difficult to remove, require more equipment to do so, and only a few beekeepers are willing to complete this type of work. On the KSU Swarm Catcher's list, there are notes for those who are willing to do wall void work. There is usually a charge associated with wall void and bee tree removal. Many will require the homeowner to hire their own contractor to repair work after the bee and hive removal is complete which can add additional costs to the homeowner.

If you need help finding a beekeeper in your area or need more information, please contact Sharon Dobesh at sdobesh@ksu.edu or by calling 785-532-1340. (SD)

Watering Houseplants While on Vacation



We are approaching the time of year when many people take vacation. In the rush to get everything done before leaving, don't forget your houseplants will probably need watering while you are gone. The best alternative is to have someone water them for you. However, if this is not possible, there are alternatives.

1. Well-watered plants can be placed inside a plastic bag. Prop up the bag by using wooden dowels or something similar to keep the plastic off the leaves. Make sure the enclosed plants will not receive full sun as heat buildup may cook them. Bright, indirect light is best. Plants should keep for about a week with this method.

2. This method requires an old dish drying rack, a bathtub in a bathroom with some natural light and some shoelaces. Place the drying rack upside down in the tub and add several inches of water. Push one end of a shoelace through a drainage hole on the bottom of a pot and into the potting soil of your houseplant. The other end of the shoelace dangles into the water. What you have made is a wick system that will replace water in the pot as the plant uses it. Plants can last a couple of weeks if you have enough natural light.

3. There are numerous commercial products that can be used to automatically water houseplants in your absence. The advantage of these products is that the houseplant does not normally need to be moved. All require a reservoir from which water is either siphoned or pumped to individual houseplants. Houseplants should last as long as the water holds out. (WU)

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