

## Horticulture 2014 Newsletter No. 20 May 20, 2014

Video of the Week: [Stake and Weave Tomatoes](#)

### TURFGRASS

#### Controlling Yellow Nutsedge in Lawns



Yellow nutsedge is a relatively common problem in lawns, especially in wet years or in lawns with irrigation. Although it looks much like a grass, it is a sedge. Unlike grasses, sedges have triangular stems, and the leaves are three-ranked instead of two-ranked, which means the leaves come off the stems in three different directions. Yellow nutsedge is pale green to yellow and grows rapidly in the spring and early summer. Because of this rapid shoot growth, it sticks up above the rest of the lawn only a few days after mowing. This weed is a

good indicator of poor drainage, but it can be introduced into well-drained sites through contaminated topsoil or nursery stock. As with many weeds, nutsedge is less competitive in a dense, healthy lawn than in an open, poor lawn.

Nutsedge is difficult to control culturally because it produces numerous tubers that give rise to new plants. Pulling nutsedge will increase the number of plants because dormant tubers are activated. However, it is possible to control nutsedge by pulling, but you must be persistent. If you are, eventually the nutsedge will die out.

If you were going to treat with an herbicide, it would be better to leave the nutsedge plants undisturbed so the herbicide can be maximally translocated to the roots, rhizomes, and tubers. Several herbicides are available for nutsedge control. Sedge Hammer, which used to be called Manage, is the most effective and safe for most turfgrasses. It is also the most expensive, but if an infestation is not too severe, one application should take care of the problem. The Sedge Hammer label says to apply it after nutsedge has reached the three- to eight-leaf stage. Waiting until this growth stage apparently results in improved translocation of the active ingredient to the underground tubers and rhizomes. However, research has shown that the application should go down by June 21. If the initial spray is after June 21, mature daughter tubers may be stimulated to grow.

Small packages of Sedge Hammer are available to homeowners. Using a non-ionic surfactant with the Sedge Hammer will give better control. (Ward Upham)

## VEGETABLES

### 'Staggering' Sweetcorn Plantings



Sweet corn is one of those crops that is only "good" for a few days. If you want longer periods of production, consider staggering the planting. In other words, plant a small block, wait a period of time, and then plant the next block. Though it is tempting to follow a calendar schedule, such as planting a small block every week, it is better to use crop development as a trigger. If you plant on a calendar schedule, you may have noticed that later plantings often catch up with earlier ones. Instead, plant the next block of sweet corn when the previous one is one-half to one inch tall.

(Ward Upham)

## PESTS

### Eastern Tent Caterpillar



The egg masses of the eastern tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma americanum*, have hatched and the larvae (caterpillars) are feeding on plants. After hatching, the caterpillars create distinct white, silken tents or nests in the branch crotches of trees and shrubs including crabapple, hawthorn, mountain ash, and flowering cherry. Eastern tent caterpillar is one of our earliest defoliators, and although the feeding damage may not initially kill a plant, it may reduce the plants ability to produce food, thus increasing susceptibility to secondary pests such as wood-boring insects.

Eastern tent caterpillar overwinters as an egg mass attached to the branches of small twigs.

It is really easy to just physically remove the silken nests by hand (if you are somewhat squeamish about this you can wear gloves) or use a rake to destroy the silken nest or forceful water spray to "blast" the silken nest from plants (kids will love this). Any exposed caterpillars may be consumed by birds lurking nearby. Caterpillars are active during the day-time and reside in their silken nest during the evening. It is during the day-time that caterpillars emerge from the silken nest and feed on plant leaves. On overcast days the caterpillars will be inside the silken nest.

Sprays of *Bacillus thuringiensis* subsp. *kurstaki* (Dipel and other formulations) are effective when the caterpillars are small. Once the caterpillars are mature (approximately 2.0 inches long), then other insecticides will have to be applied such as acephate (Orthene), carbaryl (Sevin), spinosad (Captain Jack's DeadBug Brew or Conserve), and any pyrethroid-based insecticide with the active ingredients: bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, and lambda-cyhalothrin). For more information regarding Eastern tent caterpillar management contact your county or state extension specialist. (Raymond Cloyd)

## A Flurry of Wings? “Miller Moths”



“Miller moths” is a generic term used to describe various species of plain brown drab moth. Because their wings are covered with scales, they produce “dust” as they flit about. Upon close examination, it can be seen that moths (in fact) have very distinctive wing patterns beyond the plain, brown and drab generic descriptor. In particular, army cutworm moths (*Euxoa auxillaris*) illustrate the variability of moths. There are 5 morphological forms of army cutworm moths. Each possesses its own intricate and distinctive wing pattern. Adding more variety, brown specimens of each are males, whereas grayish individuals are females.

With the approach of daylight, army cutworm moths seek shelter/cover in any conceivable space: a car window left open overnight is an example – and when one gets ready to drive to work, he/she will be greeted by a flurry of excited moths; open a polycart to deposit a trash bag and you may be greeted by a rush of moths; take an early morning walk and as you pass a line of shrubs, you may be startled by hundreds of excited moths darting out; and so on. In homes, catch or swat a moth on your wall or curtains and you will find a coating of the aforementioned “dust”/wing scales left behind.

Because moths can exploit very small openings, it is virtually impossible to exclude moths from entering homes/buildings. However, the nuisance period is short-lived. Simply, as if by magic, moths quickly disappear. On an unknown cue, moths from the entire central plains region form massive westward flights to the Rocky Mountains. Feeding throughout the summer at the cooler higher elevations, moths become sexually mature and also accumulate fat reserves. By fall, moths migrate back to the central plains. Each female moth is capable of producing between 1000 – 3000 eggs. Larvae emerge and begin feeding. Partially grown larvae are then the overwintering stage of the species. (Bob Bauernfeind)

## Ladybird Beetles



Both the adults and the larvae of the ladybird beetle are beneficial and do not feed on plants but rather on other insects including aphids, mealybugs, whiteflies, scale insects and the eggs of various other insects. So if you see these insects, do not spray. The larval form looks like a very small alligator-shaped insect. Larvae are covered with spines, about 3/8-inch long, and black with orange markings. (Ward Upham)

## 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. (Ward Upham)

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