

## Horticulture 2011 Newsletter

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Video of the Week: [Dividing Iris](#)

### VEGETABLES

#### Tomatoes Slow to Ripen?



The hot, dry weather we have had recently not only interferes with tomato fruit color formation and flower pollination (see last week's newsletter) but also can affect how quickly fruit matures. The best temperature for tomato growth and fruit development is 85 to 90F. When temperatures exceed 100 degrees, the plant goes into survival mode and concentrates on moving water. Fruit development slows to a crawl. When temperatures moderate, even to the low to mid 90s, the fruit will ripen more quickly. (WU)

#### Tomato Fruit Sunscald



Extreme heat and bright sunlight can sunscald tomato fruit, leaving a light yellow to white sunken spot that resembles a blister. This most often happens to fruit that is exposed to full sun after losing foliage to disease or tomato hornworms. Remove damaged fruit to encourage more fruit set. Sunburned fruit are rarely usable. (WU)

## Onions: Named Variety Versus Unnamed Set



Does planting a recommended variety make a difference when growing onions? The answer is yes, according to a field test performed this year at the K-State Gardens. A demonstration plot was set up comparing onions grown from an unnamed set with a recommended variety named Super Star. The onions were harvested last week with the following results. Those grown from unnamed sets averaged 2.7 inches in diameter as compared to 3.6 inches for Super Star. Even more impressive was the difference in weight. Super Star was three

times as massive (12.5 ounces) as the unnamed set (4.1 ounces).

Unfortunately, if recommended varieties are not carried locally, you may need to grow your own from seed. Start under lights in the latter half of January. Onions do not need to be grown in individual cells but can be broadcast seeded in a flat. This is done by placing seeding media in a flat or other container and sprinkling seed on top of the media. Add additional media to cover the seed and begin watering.

Start hardening the onions off about mid-March by placing them outside in a location protected from sun and wind, and then gradually moving them to a more exposed place. After a week, they should be ready to be transplanted. Harvest normally occurs about mid-July. (WU)

## Bitter Cucumbers



A bitter taste in cucumbers is the result of stress that can be caused by a number of factors, including heredity, moisture, temperature, soil characteristics, and disease. Most often this occurs during the hot part of the summer or later in the growing season.

Two compounds, cucurbitacins B and C, give rise to the bitter taste. Though often only the stem end is affected, at times the entire fruit is bitter. Also, most of the bitter taste is found in and just under

the skin. Bitter fruit is not the result of cucumbers cross-pollinating with squash or melons. These plants cannot cross-pollinate with one another.

Often newer varieties are less likely to become bitter than older ones. Proper cultural care is also often helpful. Make sure plants have the following:

- Well-drained soil with a pH between 6.0 and 6.5. Plenty of organic matter also helps.
- Mulch. Mulch helps conserve moisture and keeps roots cool during hot, dry weather.

- Adequate water especially during the fruiting season.
- Disease and insect control. (WU)

### Fall Gardening: the Cole Crops



Probably the last thing most gardeners are thinking of now is planting vegetables. However, for those hardy few, now is the time to start the cole crops such as cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower. These members of the cabbage family can be either seeded directly in the garden or started in pots for transplanting about mid-August.

Plant slightly deeper than you would in the spring so the seed stays cooler and the soil around the seed stays moist longer. Plant more thickly and thin later.

Use light amounts of fertilizer before planting. For example, apply 1/4 cup of a low-analysis fertilizer (6-7-7) per 10 feet of row. Sidedress two weeks after transplanting or four weeks after sowing seed by applying 2 tablespoons of a 16-0-0 or 1 tablespoon of a 27-3-3, 30-3-4 fertilizer, or something similar per plant.

Watering must occur more frequently because seed should not be allowed to dry out. Overhead watering often causes soil to crust, making it more difficult for young, tender plants to emerge. Prevent this by applying a light sprinkling of peat moss, vermiculite or compost directly over the row after seeding. Even better, use a soaker hose right next to the row to allow water to slowly seep into the ground.

Plants should be ready for harvest in late September to early October, with broccoli side shoots developing well into November, weather permitting. (WU)

## TURFGRASS

### Is My Lawn Still Alive?

Though many areas of Kansas had plenty of rainfall during the spring, recently we have been much drier, resulting in lawns going dormant due to a lack of moisture. Normally, a healthy lawn can stay dormant for a good 5 weeks and still recover. After the five weeks are up, it is important to keep the crown hydrated because if the crown dies, the plant dies. Apply about 1/4 inch of water every two weeks to hydrate the crown. This will be enough to



hydrate the crown but not enough to encourage weed germination and growth.

The recommendations differ for a lawn that was overwatered so that it had a limited root system. Such a lawn may die unless allowed to slowly enter dormancy. This is done by shutting off the water gradually. For example, instead of watering several times a week, wait a week before irrigating. Then don't water again for two weeks. Thereafter, water every two weeks as described above.

If you are wondering if the turf is still alive, pull up an individual plant and separate the leaves from the crown. The crown is the area between the leaves and the roots. If it is still hard and not papery and dry, the plant is still alive.

When rains and cooler weather arrive, the turf should come out of dormancy. However, we will probably have to deal with weeds that germinate before the turfgrass grows enough to provide good cover. (WU)

## PESTS

### What is Eating My Sweet Potato Vine?



It is time to be on the lookout for a picturesque insect called the golden tortoise beetle, *Charidotella bicolor*. This beetle is oval and bright, metallic gold, orange-red, or yellow-green. They may be mistaken for ladybird beetle adults, but they really don't look like ladybird beetles. The beetle feeds primarily on ornamental sweet potato vines and plants in the morning glory family (Convolvulaceae). The beetle creates small, round, irregular-shaped holes in leaves during feeding that somewhat resemble slug damage, but there is

no slime trail on the plants. Beetles may be present on leaf undersides during the day. Larvae are flattened and spiny, and may be yellow to red-brown. They feed on leaf undersides, and carry their cast skins and feces on their back. There is usually one generation per year. Control or management is generally not required because ornamental sweet potato vines produce such an abundance of leaves that the adult and/or larvae will not cause significant plant damage. (RC)

### Brown Recluse Spiders

These spiders are reclusive, but they will bite if they are against your skin and movement is restricted. For example, if you put on a shirt with a spider in the sleeve, it will probably feel restricted and bite. Unfortunately, a brown recluse bite is serious and requires a visit to a doctor.



Brown recluse spiders vary in color with abdomens that may be straw-colored, pinkish-gray, pale to medium brown, or slate gray. They have one distinctive characteristic – a dark, violin-shaped pattern on the front of the back. The neck of the violin points toward the rear of the arachnid.

Though structurally tight houses are less likely to have brown recluse populations, any home may be invaded. Houses with a number of unreachable spots may have standing populations that are difficult or impossible to eliminate. In such cases, it is important to reduce numbers and minimize the chances of being bitten.

Two strategies may help. Take advantage of the spiders' daily rhythm. Brown recluse normally hide during the day and don't come out until an hour or two after dark. The search-and-destroy strategy may prove effective if timed to coincide with their activity. Carry a crawling insect spray as you search for the spiders within a foot or two of walls. After destroying any spiders you find, look for a crack they may have been using to hide. Spray the insecticide into that crack and remember to caulk or otherwise seal it. Caulking shut the crack is best, but if caulking will ruin the aesthetics of the room continue to spray into it every 10 days or two weeks. You may want to log the number and date of spider kills to see if you are making progress.

The second strategy involves the use of roach or mouse glue traps. Place these in spots the spiders are likely to be, such as dark areas, around boxes, and close to walls and room corners. Again, track the catch to see if you are having an effect on numbers.

There are a number of insecticides labeled for spiders but spot treatment with synthetic pyrethroids such as Tempo (cyfluthrin) or Demon (cypermethrin) are especially effective. Cyfluthrin is packaged for homeowners as Bayer Home Pest Control Indoor/Outdoor Insect Killer. Remember, it's best to study the problem and develop a strategy before beginning control measures. For more information refer to publication, MF771, Spiders and Scorpions. You can find it on the Web at: <http://kpbs.konza.ksu.edu/Spiderbites.pdf>  
(WU)

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