

Blister Beetles

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. You've been going out to pick tomatoes from your garden for a couple of weeks now when all of a sudden you go out one morning and half of your tomato plants are stripped of leaves. While you might think tomato hornworm, what we may also be seeing, especially this year, is blister beetles! Blister beetles are long skinny beetles that may be black, gray or tan, although most of the ones we're seeing right now are gray. They travel in swarms and will literally drop out of the air on a garden or crop and just start eating like crazy. While you may have a desire to start grabbing and crushing them, I wouldn't recommend it. They are called blister beetles for a very good reason. Their body fluids contain a powerful irritant that can cause large watery blisters on skin. In fact horses are so sensitive to this irritant less than a dozen dead blister beetles in a mouthful of hay will kill them! If you find yourself dealing with a swarm of hungry blister beetles, I'd recommend using one of the pyrethroid garden insecticides and apply a thorough soaking spray. Cyfluthrin would be my product of choice - it's found in Bayer vegetable and garden spray. By the way, cyfluthrin is probably one of the best products to use for squash bugs also. If plants were nearly completely stripped of leaves they may come back and releaf. Give them a little shot of fertilizer and water them down good. If they are going to start to leaf back out you should see something seven to ten days after being fed on. Since they just fly in, feed and then move on, there's no way to deal with them other than spray. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

Chuck Otte.

Leaf Scorch on trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While we tend to remember the hot days of summer, we quickly forget about those days with normal or below normal heat. This summer, so far, is a good case in point! But we still have had enough sun, heat and wind to cause scorch on trees and shrubs. Scorch is a frustrating seldom understood physiological condition in which leaves of the tree start to turn brown often from the edges inwards. The brown may only creep part way across the leaf or it may kill the entire leaf. But in other situations, maples especially, the scorch will show up as brown spots on the leaves, usually between the veins. These spots can grow killing the entire leaf. These spots will often have distinct ring like patterns reminding you of a target and often making homeowners think that there is a disease involved. The damage often first shows up on the south or west side of a plant OR that side receiving the most wind and sun. Scorch is not an indication of dry soils or drought stress. Those symptoms show up as wilting and loss of green leaves. Scorch is the inability of the plant to move enough water from the roots to the leaves to counteract the loss of moisture from the leaf surface. It is more pronounced in younger trees that have yet to develop a large root system. All you can do is keep the tree or shrub well watered, but don't drown it. Many scorch issues can be solved by careful selection and placement of landscape trees. But some species, like maples, are just going to do it on young trees when we hit some hot dry windy weather in summer. Be aware, and don't panic! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cracking Tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. What a year for tomatoes. The weather has been all over the board and we've seen our fair share of blossom end rot, early blight and septoria blight. One thing that happens when we have variable weather, especially rainfall, is that we can wind up with cracks on our tomatoes. Cracks on tomatoes are usually on the upper (stem) end of the tomato and will either be concentric, think of target like circles running around the fruit, or radial, lines running from the stem area down the sides of the fruit towards the blossom end.

Cracking of tomatoes is a water issue. Tomatoes have an awesome root system but it sometimes is out of balance with the above ground portion of the plant. Early in the summer the root system is small and that can lead to blossom end rot. But by August, the root system is massive and is very efficient at extracting water out of the soil. In fact, it is often doing too good of a job. If there is a lot of soil moisture fluctuation the tomato fruits will gain and lose moisture. If the soil has been dry and then a nice rain or irrigation comes along, the plant sucks up a lot of water in a hurry, it moves this water to the fruit. In fact it can move so much water so fast, the skin of the fruit can't grow and stretch fast enough and it splits. The simple solution is to keep soil moisture constant around your tomato plants and mulch the soil to slow soil moisture fluctuations. A longer term solution is to plant varieties with good crack resistance. In general, older heirloom tomatoes are more susceptible to cracking and newer varieties less. Something to remember for next year! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.