

Fall Webworm

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I discussed fall webworms a couple of weeks ago when the problem was just getting started. Now it is becoming very obvious! Just as a reminder, fall webworm is the pest that feeds on tree leaves - virtually all species except conifers - and shows up as a mass of webbing at the end of the branch. Some people mistakenly refer to this as bagworms as they feel that the webby mass looks like a bag on the end of the branch. But bagworm refers to a completely different and very serious insect pest of junipers. Webworms are an aesthetic nuisance that basically doesn't hurt the health of the tree. With that said, let me add that in other parts of the country, webworms can become a serious issue, especially for pecan or walnut trees if you are trying to grow nuts. I was in Arkansas for a conference a couple of weeks ago and saw trees that were totally stripped of leaves. If these trees would have been in a production pecan orchard we would have been looking at some serious production loss. However, even in these cases, the tree will be fine. In fact many of these trees were already putting on new growth. If the webbing annoys you, take a long wooden pole, drive a couple of nails in it, stick it into the mass and twist it to remove the webbing. Once the webbing is removed you can spray the caterpillars feeding inside. Normal spraying won't help as the spray never penetrates the web. Or just ignore it if you want. But please, please do not start cutting off branch tips and certainly don't stick a torch up there to burn the webs. Both of these cause too much damage! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Hummingbird Feeders

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. August and September are the peak period for southbound hummingbird migration. This is also the best time of the year to make sure that you have a hummingbird feeder out where you and your family can watch it. Hummingbird numbers will continue to increase through early September and then start to dwindle as we get towards the end of the month. A few hummingbirds will linger into early October. Each time we have a cold front and the wind switches to the north we can expect a new wave of hummers to arrive.

Feeding hummingbirds is really quite simple. Get yourself a hummingbird feeder - there are many inexpensive feeders for under \$10. Find a location 4 to 8 feet off the ground where you can easily reach it and where it is easily seen from your house. You don't need to buy the premixes or the concentrates for your feeder, just get some granulated sugar and mix one part sugar with four parts water. You don't have to boil it but warm water will help the sugar go into solution easier. Once the sugar is all dissolved, fill the feeder, hang it up and wait for the show to begin. Just a few considerations - you don't need red dye in the water, in fact hummingbirds are probably better off without it. NEVER use honey or artificial sweeteners, just sugar. You don't have to fill your feeder completely full. You want to change the solution every few days so start out filling it about half full. If they start emptying it in less than a day, you can fill it fuller. Then leave the feeder up until well into fall - no need to be in a hurry to take it down. If you have any questions, call me! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pesticide Failures

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I regularly receive questions from homeowners basically complaining that a particular herbicide, but sometimes an insecticide, didn't work. It's always that the pesticide failed, when in reality, it is more likely that the pesticide applicator failed. When you look at a lawn herbicide label you will see that it tells you how many ounces of product to use in how many gallons of water to cover a certain number of square feet. If you follow this mixing rate, but then try to spray more area than it is recommending, you have just reduced, often greatly the amount of product you are putting on per area. You have effectively watered down your herbicide to a rate that you aren't applying enough to control the weed. Sometimes you may be trying to control a large weed with a herbicide designed to control a small weed, OR you may be using a herbicide that isn't even designed to control that type of plant. If you try to use a product containing 2,4-D to control crabgrass you are going to be very disappointed. The same thing happens with insect or disease control. A pesticide designed to control insects, like Sevin, is not going to do any good on controlling a disease. Some insecticides work great on some groups of insects but not at all on others. Trying to use sevin to control spider mites results in a train wreck as it won't control the mites, but it will control many of the natural predators of the mites. Bottom line, know your pest, be it a weed a bug or a disease, use the right product at the right rate in the right amount at the right time, or you won't control the pest! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bitter Cucumbers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Those of us who garden do so because we enjoy growing fresh produce and especially eating fresh produce. We know that nothing can compare to something that you grew yourself and left on the plant to the perfect point of maturity and then harvested and ate. Homegrown tomatoes are the best!! But every once in a while there is a hiccup in the system and great excitement about fresh veggies goes south when you slice up that cucumber take a bite and your mouth turns inside out because the cucumber is horribly bitter!

This is a fairly common problem that is brought about by the production of two compounds known as cucurbitacin B and C. These compounds are developed by the plant as a result to stress during the period of time that the fruit is growing. This stress can be caused by cultivar genetics, moisture, temperature, soil characteristics or disease. Just anything that stresses the cucumber plant is likely to cause this problem. While the bitterness compounds are often concentrated at the stem end of the fruit they can cause the entire fruit to be bitter. The majority of the bitterness is located just under the skin so deeply peeling and removing the stem end of the fruit can help reduce the bitterness and often salvage most of the fruit. Then anything you can do including mulching and regular watering can help reduce the risk. And, contrary to what your neighbor may have told you, this is not caused by cross pollination with other vine crops. Cucumbers have a different chromosome number than all other vine crops so they can NOT be pollinated by these! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cicada Killer Wasps

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late summer is the season of the giant wasps that scare the living daylights out of many homeowners. These large, 1.5 to 2 inch long yellow, black and reddish orange wasps are cicada killers. Females of this large wasp, locate cicadas in trees, sting them and paralyze them, not killing them but paralyzing them, and she then drags and flies this cicada back to the nest, which is a hole in the ground surrounded by lots of finely granulated soil. Once she has the cicada down in the nest burrow she lays an egg with it and then starts over again. The paralyzed cicada then becomes the food source for one larval cicada killer.

Interestingly, the female can control whether the egg will develop into a male or female and females get two cicadas to feed on. The cicada killers will be active from now until about mid September. Once the female gets her nest filled she will spend the rest of the summer feeding on nectar and pollen. The female has a stinger that she can use on humans, but generally doesn't unless threatened. Most of the time she is busy finding cicadas and dragging them to the burrow. She doesn't waste time hanging around the burrow. All of those big scary wasps that are flying back and forth around the burrows are males. Males have no stinger but they try to bluff everything else away in case a new female emerges to mate with. Yup, it's all about sex! You can ignore these silly males, you can spray them with wasp and hornet killer, or you can take your tennis racket out and have lobbing practice. If you can just leave them alone, they'll disappear soon. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.