

Bagworms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'm kind of surprised by the number of people who are still calling me because, lo and behold, they just discovered that they have bagworms! Contrary to what some homeowners think, these bagworms do not just drop out of the sky overnight and suddenly show up on their junipers or cedars. Young bagworms can not travel long distances. A couple hundred feet is the maximum. The adult bagworm is a moth. The female can not fly. She will lay her eggs in the bag that she grew up in. These are not highly mobile critters unless they wind up attaching to a vehicle - which has happened before! The bigger they get the harder they are to kill. There is one generation per year and these hatched the early part of June. They are starting to get some size now and as they grow so do their appetites. In about another month they will be pretty well through feeding and they will start to pupate. At that time, it is very hard to kill them. If you have junipers or cedars, or even arborvitae, you need to check them for bagworms, especially if you had them last year or your neighbors had them last year. Don't look for bags that are an inch or two long, they aren't that big yet. If you find some and watch them you will probably see them subtly moving as they feed. This late in the season, you want to use an insecticide that contains spinosad, an organic control that is highly effective against bagworms. You can find spinosad in products like Conserve, Colorado Potato Beetle Beater, Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew and Monterey Garden Insect Spray. Apply with a hose end sprayer. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bacterial Blight of Cucumbers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It's an all too common scenario. You're going along through the gardening season and all of a sudden your cucumber or muskmelon vines start to wilt. So you turn the water on. You come out the next morning and they look fine, but by afternoon they are wilting again, even though the ground is wet. In a day or two the vines don't come out of the wilt and in a few more days the vines are dead. More than likely you are seeing bacterial wilt. Take a larger vine and cut through it with a sharp knife. Clean the knife, squeeze some sap out of the vine, press the flat part of the knife blade down on the sap and then slowly pull the knife blade away. If there's strands of sap stringing from the vine and the blade, you have bacterial wilt. You might as well pull the plant up and dispose of it at that point because there's nothing you can do to save it. The bacteria is carried to the plant by cucumber beetles. While the insect is chewing on the leaves, the bacteria, which live in the gut of the cucumber beetle, winds up in the saliva of the beetle and the feeding wounds serve as the infection source. The disease progresses rapidly with first symptoms showing up 6 to 7 days after feeding damage. To prevent bacterial blight you need to start spraying for cucumber beetles before you ever see them. Just about any of the lawn and garden insecticides will control cucumber beetles. Permethrin and sevin or carbaryl are the most commonly used insecticides. Check the label for waiting period after treatment until you can harvest. Also check for re-treatment intervals. Either dusts or sprays will work. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Blossom End Rot - In depth

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I've been getting a lot more questions about blossom end rot. The good news is that many of the tomato plants should be outgrowing this problem soon. Again, blossom end rot is when the end of the tomato fruit turns black or brown and appears to sink in and rot. It isn't a disease but a physiological condition caused by a temporary calcium imbalance in the plant. Many factors can make blossom end rot worse. Extreme fluctuations in temperature and soil moisture can really crank this one up. Tying right in with that is inconsistent watering. Mulching can help stabilize soil moisture but if it is a typical Kansas summer, just get on a watering plan and irrigate every few days. We have very few soils that are deficient in calcium so adding more calcium to the soil generally doesn't help. What also doesn't help are the calcium sprays that you can buy to improve fruit set. These don't work because calcium can't move from the leaves to the fruit and the waxy surface of the fruit prevents it from absorbing any of the calcium spray. We do know that fertilizers with a nitrogen source that comes from ammonia can make it worse as the presence of the ammonia ion in the soil mix can block roots taking up calcium. If you have a severe problem annually consider switching to a non ammonia form such as calcium nitrate or nitrate of soda. It may take a little looking around, but they are out there. Also, avoid using any of the fertilizers that you dissolve in water and spray on the leaves. Foliar feeding is not efficient and they all use ammonia nitrate forms. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Onion Harvest and Storage

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Generally, if we get onions planted in the normal time frame, we are ready to start harvesting in mid July, at least for some of the earlier cultivars. Onions are ready to harvest when about half the plants have tops that have fallen over. This happens because the plants are mature and are starting to die down. Once you notice that some are starting to go down you can hasten the process by walking the onions which means you carefully step on the leaves right at the neck to bend them over and start the top drying down. A couple of days after you've walked down the tops you want to get them pulled because they can sunburn if left in direct sunlight. Sunburned onions will have a much shorter storage life. For onions, and you can include garlic in this discussion, the secret to good storage life is getting the necks well dried down before storage. You can lay them out on screens in a warm shaded area, like a garage or tie the tops and hang them in a warm dry area. How long it takes to dry depends on the type of onion. Large necked varieties will obviously take longer than small necked varieties like Bermuda types. If you aren't sure if the necks are dry, cut off one about an inch above the bulb with scissors. If it's totally papery dry it's ready for storage. If it still has moisture, you need to wait. While you want to leave the papery outer layers on, you can snip the tops off to an inch or two above the bulb and even rub off the roots or clip them. Do not store onions or garlic in plastic bags. Use an open mesh bag and keep in a cool, but not cold, dry location. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Squash Blooms but no fruit

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It never fails that every year I will receive phone calls from folks whose vine crops are blooming and blooming and blooming, but they are getting absolutely no cucumbers or squash or melons setting on. Well, vine crops are very dependent on pollinators, meaning bees of some sort. Lots of rainy weather at blooming time can keep the bees away and therefore no pollination. But more often than not, there is another problem. I'll ask the gardener what kinds of flowers are blooming. This is usually followed by dead silence. You see, vine crops have separate male and female flowers. They are borne on the same plant, but there are male and female flowers and they are actually easy to tell apart. Male flowers are born on a long slender element, sometimes several inches long. Female flowers are always connected to the vine by a miniature version of whatever kind of vine crop it is. It may look like a miniature squash or melon or cucumber. This primal fruit forms before the female flower even opens. If the female flower is successfully pollinated, it will continue to grow and develop into the mature fruit. Now here's the kicker. It is quite common for male flowers to start blooming several weeks before the female flowers develop. The plant will just keep cranking out male flowers and eventually it will start producing female flowers and then you'll be a happy gardener. All those early male flowers aren't necessarily a waste of energy though. They do provide pollen and nectar for the bees, but you can also harvest the fresh flowers, batter them, deep fry them and eat them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.