

Bagworms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, I let you off easy last week and didn't talk about bagworms. Did you miss it? Bagworm calls have slowed down but I'm expecting them to take a jump in a couple more weeks. This week is almost the last call. The bagworms are getting noticeably larger. I'm seeing some that are up to an inch long and maybe slightly longer. They should start to be easily seen. Now remember, if you spray and kill the bagworms they will hang on to the host plant for weeks, sometimes even years. If you are still seeing really small bags on your trees, as in less than a half inch long, the bagworms are probably dead and you just have the bag remaining. But if the bags are an inch long and bigger you can probably see them moving and they are actively feeding! At this point in time their appetites are increasing along with their size. If you are driving down the road and see cedar trees that just don't look very green, they've got bagworms. As they grow they also become harder to kill. By now I would strongly encourage you to be switching to the control product spinosad (looks like spin-o-sad). This comes in a hose end sprayer product or a concentrate that you can mix up in your own large volume sprayer. The bigger they get the more critical it becomes to apply a thorough soaking spray. They are becoming harder to kill and by early August, I just wouldn't even waste my time. It's imperative that you are out checking your trees and shrubs now while you can still control them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Slime Molds

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As dry as it's been I'm surprised that I am still occasionally running across slime molds. While most likely to be seen in heavily irrigated yards, I had some of the charcoal dust form on the lawn here at the Extension Office that isn't watered. Okay, slime molds aren't really a mold as in a fungus based organism living off of another plant. Slime molds are very ancient life forms that obtain their sustenance from the air. The spores float around in the breeze, land on a suitable substrate where they grow rapidly, mature and disappear about as fast as they appeared. There are two fairly common varieties that I seem to encounter or I'm routinely asked about. The first one is the charcoal dust slime mold. It usually shows up on blades of grass where it looks like charcoal powder or charcoal ash. You may not see it until you mow over it with a resulting explosion of gray powder from your mower. On closer examination you will see that some of the grass leaves are just covered in a black or gray powder. The other form it takes is the dog vomit slime mold. This descriptive name says it all and this one is usually on mulch in landscaping. Neither one is damaging to the lawn or landscape. The charcoal dust on the grass will go away soon or you can wash it off with the hose. The dog vomit slime mold is actually quite firm and you can pick it up with your shovel, or your hand if you are brave, and just throw it in the trash. Either one can cause a moment of excitement but both are harmless! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

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. Several times in recent weeks gardeners have brought me photos on their phones or actual bugs in a container that have been stripping their tomato plants of leaves. In this case it wasn't those big ugly green tomato hornworms, but a medium sized long and narrow charcoal gray beetle. Or it could have been a brown striped one or a black one. All three are blister beetles and they can be as sinister as they are destructive. Blister beetles, as an immature larval form, are very beneficial feeding on grasshopper eggs. As grasshopper numbers increase, which is common in hot dry weather, blister beetles are also likely to increase. But when these beneficial larva turn into adults, they have an appetite for foliage. They love alfalfa, they love tomatoes, they love certain other weeds. The gray blister beetles, in fact most species of blister beetles, are swarming insects. You can have a swarm go into flight, drop out of the sky onto you garden and within 24 hours your tomato plants can be nothing but bones. The sinister part is that blister beetles have a chemical in their body fluids that if you get it on your skin, will create blisters. It's very caustic and isn't nice. So don't start smashing them with your fingers. If you see them move quickly and use any standard garden insecticide. This is one that the insecticidal dusts are very effective against. Sprinkle it on, or spray a liquid, and in short order you can knock the population down and that is likely all you'll see of them this year. I hope! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Harvest and Storage of Fruits and Vegetables

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I mentioned a bulletin last week about harvest and storage of fruits and vegetables. This bulletin is absolutely awesome whether you are a gardener or not. If you do garden it's a wonderful guide to help you know the proper time to harvest produce (and I will talk about tomatoes tomorrow by the way!) If you simply buy a lot of fresh produce this bulletin also talks about the best way to store it once you get it home as well as how long you can expect something to store after harvest. Did you know that a head of cabbage can be kept in refrigerated storage for up to 13 months? I've talked about how onions and garlic should not be stored in a refrigerator. Horseradish can be kept, as the intact root for over half a year. Muskmelon, or cantaloupe if you prefer, can be stored for up to 2 weeks in plastic bags in the refrigerator. Irish potatoes grown in the traditional spring time frame actually don't store as well as potatoes grown in the fall season and harvested as the weather is cooling down. A good reason to be out planting some potatoes right now! Fresh peppers, either sweet or hot, should be used within a few days of harvest for maximum flavor. While they will last longer in the refrigerator quality does diminish over time. However, you can dry hot peppers and keep them around for a year or longer - I've done that!! Finally, that eternally favorite summer fruit, watermelon. Watermelons can last a week at room temperature or 2 to 3 weeks in the fridge. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Harvesting Tomatoes When Half Ripe?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One of the great misconceptions of all times is that for maximum flavor you have to leave a tomato on the vine until it is at the absolute peak of color change. How many times have you looked at a tomato that was so close to perfect and you thought, you know, just one more day and it's going to be awesome. You come back the next day and your wonderful tomato has been nailed by a big old fat tomato fruitworm. Agggghh! You're mad, you feel cheated and you want to throw that tomato and the fruitworm against a brick wall. Here's what you need to know that nobody tells you, OR you don't want to believe. Once that tomato starts to change color, from green to pink or red or orange or yellow, whatever mature color it has, the fruit has all the flavor compounds that it will ever have. Leaving it on the vine until it has fully colored won't make it taste any better. In fact, when temperatures are routinely over 90, the tomato will probably turn to fully ripe color quicker if you take it inside. While I will admit that there is something satisfying about picking that tomato off the vine at peak color, you don't eat satisfaction, you eat the tomato. Pick it when it's reached about halfway to it's mature color. Bring it inside, set it out of the way and let it finish ripening. It will be much more consistent in timing. You will have removed it from harm's way. In fact getting it off the vine earlier will allow the plant to set on more tomatoes. And the best part of it all is that it will still taste great! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.