

Gardening with Chuck Programs for June 20 - 26, 2022

Heat and Plants

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. We went from cool and soggy to hot and dry in a big hurry. These rapid changes are not only hard on humans, they can be hard on plants. We sometimes walk a fine line right now between keeping plants well watered and drowning them. In the middle of a sunny and hot afternoon many plants, even well watered ones, can look wilted and stressed. Remember that some of this is a defense mechanism against losing too much water out the leaves. I like to check plants for moisture stress first thing in the morning. If a plant is wilted then, yeah, it needs to be watered. If it looks fine, it isn't undergoing moisture stress, yet. Also remember that earlier in the summer many plants are still getting a good root system established. Potted plants likely need to be watered daily in extreme heat. Just keep checking daily. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Potato Beetles

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. If you have potatoes you really need to be on the lookout for potato beetles right now. My potatoes are growing and blooming and hopefully pumping a lot of food into those developing tubers from all that foliage. But this is also the time that potato beetle larvae really get active. Potato beetles are a medium sized, roundish, striped beetle. The larvae are soft bodied and what I describe as earthworm brown. They start off small and can quickly grow and eat a lot of leaf area. If you just have a row or two of potatoes you can often get by with just walking the rows every morning with a bucket of soapy water and flicking any adults or larvae into the bucket. If you have a larger potato planting, then observation and a periodic spraying will handle this. I used the biological spinosad recently with good success I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Where Are My Hummingbirds

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. A common question that I receive this time of year is, "where are my hummingbirds?" June and the first half of July is nesting season for Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. The larger numbers present in May have moved on and all we have left are the breeding birds. If you aren't seeing any activity at your feeders right now then you likely don't have any nesting near your house. But fear not! Starting about the last week of July, southbound migration kicks in, peaking in late August and carrying on in through much of September. If you want to take your hummer feeders down now for lack of use, that's not a problem - you can save on a little bit of sugar expense. But be sure to get them cleaned and filled and back up around the 20th of July. Don't use red dye and just use 1 part sugar to 4 parts water! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Tomato Hornworms

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Tomato growers, it's time to be on alert! The other evening we saw a 5-spotted Hawkmoth at our petunias. This sphinx moth is the adult form of the tomato hornworm and that means that they will likely be laying eggs soon and those massive green caterpillars will start devouring your tomato plants. I rarely spray for hornworms, I just look for them and pick them off and smash them. However, there are several insects that parasitize hornworms so if you see one with white things attached to it, leave those alone as they will soon die and new little parasitic wasps will emerge to get other hornworms. Look not just for the hornworms but disappearing foliage and big green droppings. The caterpillar is very good at hiding during the day. If you spray, numerous products are available for control. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Leaf Curl on Tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I will routinely receive photos and samples of tomato leaves where the leaves are rolled up right along the midrib of the leaf and of course the gardener is in a state of panic. When tomato leaves roll up like this it is not a problem but a fairly normal situation known as leaf roll or physiological leaf curl. Tomatoes are very prone to growing rapidly in early summer and the tops get ahead of the roots. This results in two problems - leaf roll on the leaves and blossom end rot on the fruit which we will discuss in a few weeks. At this time the plant simply doesn't have a big enough root system to move enough water fast enough to keep up with the moisture demand. Keep the plant well watered, but don't waterlog it. Avoid deep hoeing close to the tomato plants, use mulch and water slowly at the base of the plants. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.