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Inquiring Minds Want to Know...

What causes my cucumbers to become bitter tasting? Any stress on cucumber plants such as high temperatures, low moisture, low fertility or foliage disease can contribute to bitterness. Bitterness is usually associated with fruit harvested late in the season from unhealthy, poor-yielding plants. Once a plant produces bitter fruit, remove it from the garden because all subsequent fruit will be affected in a similar manner.

After a recent rain, the fruit on my cucumber plants became covered with a white, cottony growth. This is Pythium, a soil borne disease. It is encouraged by heavy rains. There is no chemical control for this. Plant cucumbers in a well-drained area. Using cages or a trellis will also prevent this.

What is the “Cottonty stuff” on my maple trees? In the last few weeks I have had several calls regarding a cottony substance that is covering maple leaves and blowing off of the trees onto the ground below. No it is not snowing in June! It is an insect called the wooly alder aphid. These insects are black to gray with 10 mm wingspan. The abdomen is covered with white, fluffy wax. In this part of the world we normally see them on silver maples. It is normally rare to find them on red

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maples. Plants that are infested with the wooly alder aphid are easily recognized by the presence of large, fuzzy white colonies of insects on the foliage, twigs, or bark. Although their presence usually causes alarm and is a real nuisance, these aphids normally cause little permanent damage to the maple. As the aphids suck plant juices they secrete “honeydew”. “Honeydew” is the sticky secretion that looks like someone “poured honey over a plant”. Dark molds growing in the honeydew often disfigure the surfaces beneath infested trees which leaves surfaces and plants alike with a dark sooty appearance. In many cases due to the tree size chemical control measures are not practical. However, if trees are small enough that size is not an issue malathion or insecticidal soap offer control for homeowners.

? Distortion of Tomato Leaves

In recent weeks I have had several calls on tomato leaves that have crinkled, curled and distorted leaves. In many of these cases this was due to “sap-sucking” insects. Sucking insects include such pest as aphids and whiteflies. Aphids are noted by their soft, pear shaped body. They may be a wide variety of colors from pink, to a greenish-yellow color. And in most but not all cases where you see one...you see many! Normally if you are scouting your tomatoes you will find them on the underside of leaves, in most cases the lower leaves. After the aphids inject the sap from your tomato plant they excrete excess sap as honeydew. So it will be sticky.

Another pest that can also cause the same damage is white flies. A whitefly is a white moth-like insect in most cases they are found in conjunction with tiny yellow crawlers. It is important to control both of these pests. Not only do they cause physical damage to plants. But both pests due to their sucking nature are responsible for spreading a number of tomato viruses. Both of these pests can be controlled by applying Malathion. Malathion has a one day harvest interval after application. If you are looking for something safer than Malathion then consider some organic options. You may want to consider plantings that attract natural predators such as ladybugs. Both plants of dandelions and dill are two good options. If that doesn’t suit your fancy then consider repellent plants. Plantings of Thyme, Marigolds, and Mint help to keep down high populations of aphids.

Upcoming Events

2008 Small Fruit Field Day

On June 17, the NC Agriculture Research Station in Jackson Springs is hosting the 2008 Small Fruit Field Day. Registration will begin at 4:30 pm with program beginning at 5 pm with sponsored meal. Highlights of program include strawberry, blueberry, grape and bramble varieties; cultural practices; disease and insect management. For more information or directions contact Hannah Burrack at 919.513.4344.

Farmers’ Market - Market Station in Albemarle now open on summer schedule of each Wednesday & Saturday 7 am - 1 pm

Photo courtesy of LS Ivey, CES, Stanly County
Using a Hand Held Wick Applicator

A hand held wick applicator such as the one in the photo in the next column of the page is a cheap and economical way of applying Roundup (Glyphosate) or other non selective herbicides. The hand held wick system works great especially if you have an unwanted grass in a grass. Take for example you have ryegrass in a fescue lawn. There are few chemicals that will remove an unwanted grass in a fescue lawn. By allowing the ryegrass to get taller than the fescue one can easily wick the ryegrass with Roundup and kill it out of the lawn. The wick bar actually works much like a candle wick works. One pours a solution of one part Roundup to two parts water down the pvc pipe handle. Here the solution reaches and is absorbed by the wick. Just simply wave the wick bar over the area you would like killed. Roundup works by translocation. So it only takes a brief contact with the wick bar to get enough on the plant to kill it. This method normally works well on grass or perennial weeds with new growth. Weeds should be a minimum of 4” taller than the desired vegetation for safe application. For areas with thick clumps of weeds two passes in the opposite direction will be needed. This is a great way to selectively control weeds in gardens, flower beds etc. The other plus that I like about this method is that you can cover a large area with small amount of active ingredient! Many agriculture spray supply stores and feed and seed stores have these available!

Tomato Diseases

It is that time of year again when I get a wide variety of calls on tomato diseases. So here is a quick rundown on some things to consider when dealing with tomato diseases. First there are three things to consider when reacting to tomato diseases. By that I mean there are three different possibilities for the decline in the health of your plants. That may include a bacterial disease; a fungal disease or it could be a viral. It is important that you know which of the three you are dealing with because treatment options can be very different. In many cases bacterial disease consist of a leaf speckling. The leaf may have lesions circled by a yellow halo. If this is the case then, use of fixed coppers work well. Two commonly used name brands are Kocide and Basicop. Many of your local feed and seed stores will handle these products. Now the second possible cause of decline could be a fungal disease. Fungal diseases many times have leaf lesion characteristics similar to bacterial diseases. However, overhead irrigation or rainfall can cause splashoff onto lower leaves, thus triggering a quick breakout. In this case products containing the active ingredient “chlorothalonil” work well. One common brand name is Daconil. For those of you who have roses, this product is also labeled for control of black spot. The final possibility for decline is a viral disease. In most cases this is the worst of the three diseases. Viral diseases normally don’t have nearly as many control options. In many cases such as with Tomato Spotted Wilt virus, aphids and thrips can actually spread the virus to other plants. Many of your viral diseases are associated with plant wilt, or unusual leaf cupping and distortion. In conclusion, a good fungicide program that alternates spray applications of “fixed coppers” with “chlorothalonil” is a good way to cover your bases. Also removing lower plant leaves that are touching the soil is a good insurance policy. Another helpful tip is to use a soaker hose instead of watering with an overhead sprinkler. Both “fixed copper” and “chlorothalonil” have a “zero” day harvest interval.
# June Pruning Calendar

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