

Diggin' In The Dirt: Weed Your Vegetables!

By Chip Bubl
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Yellow jacket and hornet update

Yellow jackets don't like wet springs either. Colonies start new each year from pregnant queens that have over-wintered wherever they can find shelter. I often find the fat queens in firewood piles. In drier springs, they are often active in April and have built good size paper nests with lots of workers by this time. I have seen a number of queens that are just getting started. That means that it take considerably longer to build up colony size to truly annoying proportions. The yellow jacket family is virtually hairless and thus are easy to distinguish from honeybees and bumble bees. It is worth noting that all of the yellow jacket species (we have several) and the bald-faced hornet (in the same Vespidae family) are predators on insects in varying degrees. My rule of thumb has been not to kill them if the effort could put you at risk (like a bald-faced hornet nest 30 feet off the ground under an eave) or if they pose little or no risk to your family or livestock. The colony dies each year and the nest is not re-occupied. Only the newly pregnant queens flee the nest in the fall and survive.

The yellow jackets that nest in the ground can be very difficult to live with. Often you discover them in the course of doing something else, like baling hay (personal experience), cutting ivy (personal experience), walking the dog (personal experience), or off-

loading firewood (personal experience). In fact, I seem to have up close and personal encounters with these insects almost every year. To control either ground nests or aerial nests, you need to buy one of the aerosol hornet and wasp insecticides. Locate the opening to the nest, either at the bottom of the aerial nest or where they are going into the ground. Wait until dusk to get them all back into the hive and then spray the aerosol into the hole. Most of the canisters will spray accurately about 8-10 feet. Then get the heck out of there. Be very careful on ladders and always follow the instructions on the label. Look the next day or two to see how you have done. Ground nests are more difficult to treat since the opening might travel on a bend to the cavity where the paper nest under the ground is constructed. The insecticide has a hard time making that bend.

Don't ever plug up an exterior hole to a yellow jacket nest that is in a wall void. They can chew through sheetrock and come pouring into your home. This is not a good solution. One other note, the German yellow jacket (*Vespula germanica*) is now well established in Columbia County. It builds huge paper nests plastered against walls and rafters inside houses. These are not round nests but irregularly shaped with an interesting scalloped pattern in how the paper covering is layed down. I have seen several that were 2-4 feet wide and about 2 feet long. They were exiting through a hole in a basement or attic wall to feed outside. One of these nests

needs to be dealt with by a pest control company.

Weed your vegetables!

Vegetables are rather tender crops. They have been cultivated and coddled for so long that they really aren't very competitive. Weeds, on the other hand, make their living by being the first out of the ground. As they develop leaves, weeds capture sunlight, shading the poor vegetable seedlings and stunting their growth. The most important time in your vegetable garden is the four weeks you spend weeding after you plant the garden. Transplants reduce the weed competition problem but don't eliminate the need for vigilance. It is worth noting that if you don't thin your crop plants as well, they can compete with each other just like weed and crop seedlings compete. So thin and weed. The following table shows the yield of paired plots of various vegetables that were weeded and not weeded after the vegetables were planted from seed:

Crop	Not weeded	Weeded
Carrots	27.9 lbs.	503.3 lbs.
Beets	45.9 lbs.	240.3 lbs.
Cabbage	129.1 lbs.	233.6 lbs.
Onions	3.6 lbs.	67.7 lbs.

Poisonous plants and livestock

I recently had to give a talk on poisonous plants to a livestock group. In preparing for the talk, I was struck by how many of the worst poisonous plant cases involved cultivated plants.

In my own experience, the most serious case happened when some ornamentals, particularly yew clippings, were tossed over a fence to some 600# steers. Yews are highly toxic and several steers were dead within two hours. The take-home message is don't feed landscape trimmings or even garden plants to your stock unless you really know there will be no problems. If you have questions, call the Extension office.

The Extension Service offers its programs and materials equally to all people.

Free newsletter

The Oregon State University Extension office in Columbia County publishes a monthly newsletter on gardening and farming topics (called *County Living*) written/edited by yours truly. All you need to do is ask for it and it will be mailed to you. Call 503 397-3462 to be put on the list. Alternatively, you can find it on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/> and click on newsletters.

Contact information for the Extension office

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Intruder Alert: How Accurate Is Your Information?

By Burt Tschache

The massive amount of information stored on the Internet has made research that used to take years, into a matter of months or days if you happen to be a speed reader with a fast Internet connection. However, it comes with one large caveat, just because it is in print does not mean it is accurate.

As researchers, it is up to us to verify the information as the quality is subject to a wide range of variation due to quality of research, quality of the researcher, what the researcher wants you to know, any bias and almost any other combination that can end up as valid information, partial misinformation, partial disinformation, any combination of those three or completely out of right field.

The best tool to have in your kit for any research is a well honed BS detector. Lacking one is the cause of much misinformation and incorrect informa-

tion in any publication. Another is the paucity of good information in the particular field you are researching. The Internet allows for a wider and more rapid dispersal of the information than in days gone by, valid or not.

There are also individuals that purposely put out disinformation because they want to mislead their readers for myriad reasons. It makes the verifying process so much more difficult when you have to sort through all the disinformation as well as the misinformation in order to find the nuggets of truth within.

We have a special file folder in our brains for those issues that seem to require further evaluation. I call it my Miscellaneous file. We actually possess many of them; in fact it's arguably the largest file in our brain. It's for those bits of data from out of right field or those that produce a quandary that needs resolving, not immediately, but sometime in the future. What is required here is the ability to contain many bits

of widely varying data with our brain.

It also depends upon your belief structure as a researcher. A true researcher sets any bias aside and follows where the valid information leads. It may cross disciplines, so you must have an understanding of closely related fields or at least to the extent necessary for your project. This is where nearly all of the great discoveries occur. It is sometimes referred to as thinking outside the box.

In times past, science and religion were under the purview of the church. Galileo was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church because he had the audacity to state that the Earth was not the center of the Universe and not even the center of our Solar System. He was condemned by those that would not even look through his "magic" viewing glass.

However, each new ground-breaking discovery has at first been reviled, then ridiculed and then accepted as fact. Even Einstein was derided for his research and was unable to resolve gravity in his Theory of Relativity.

So we have come a long way from a flat Earth that is the center of the Universe and for that, we can thank researchers risking life, limb and ridicule, dedicated to understanding something never previously understood.

Whenever I am at the nexus, where revealing some new data will lead either to acclaim or stoning, I remember the words of my drama teacher, John Weldon, a Missourian in the true sense of the word, "Burt, you can't be afraid to make a fool of yourself."

More to come . . .

Be Safe Out There . . .

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