

Diggin' in the Dirt: Yellow Jackets

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Garden topics

Rhododendron leaves droop in response to moisture stress. Most recover, but some may wither if not watered soon enough. Newly planted trees and shrubs need particular irrigation attention now.

Fall webworm nests are showing up. While the nests are large and visually disturbing, the caterpillars rarely do lasting damage except on young, growing trees. They can be removed with a broom on a small tree and ignored on an older one. The caterpillars prefer walnuts, apples, cottonwoods, and sometimes, alder. They are never as destructive as the western tent caterpillar which is a spring problem.

Some other insect activity includes significant outbreak of alder flea beetles. As they feed, the larva and adults leave holes in the leaves. Their populations are cyclic and we haven't seen them like this for a number of years. Again, no treatment necessary.

Sunflowers rotate their growing point during the day from east to west and then rotate back east at night. This is called heliotropic movement for you botany fans and/or crossword puzzle enthusiasts. All this comes to a halt when the flower buds form. Then, the plants quit rotating and face east permanently. Why east and not south or west? Why stop? It turns out that flowers facing east get five times the number of pollinator visits and that seems to be related to higher morning temperatures of the flower. Flowers forced to face west and then heated artificially in the morning received more visits than unheated flowers. So, it appears, as always, it comes down to reproductive success, which for the sunflower means keeping the honey and bumble bees happy the first thing in the morning with a nice warm landing pad.

If you are in an area that got hot, you may see some sunburn on apples and peppers. Usually it occurs on the southwest side of the tree or plant.

Some "ester" herbicides including triclopyr (Crossbow and others) and ester lawn herbicides volatilize and move away from the target when it will be 80 degrees or higher even six hours after spraying. Don't use these products in the weather we have been having! You could damage your or your neighbor's

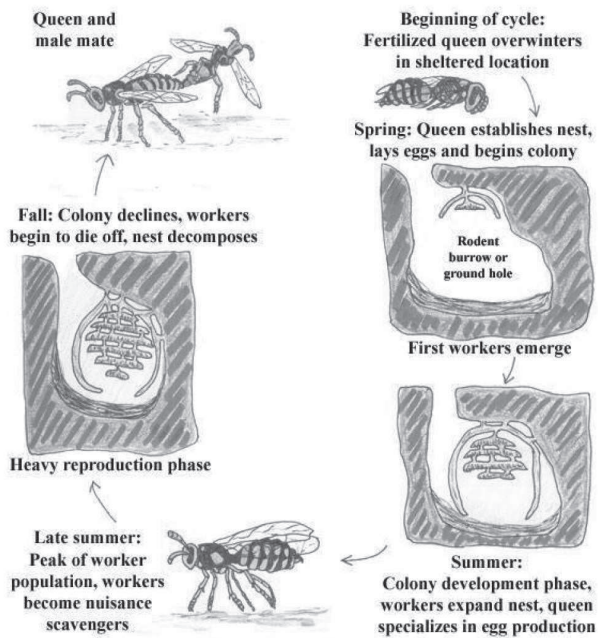
plants. Symptoms are twisted and "cupped" leaves. Tomatoes, squash, beans, and grapes are very sensitive.

Very high yellow jacket numbers

Last year we had very few yellow jackets. This year, they are thick and ornery. The difference? A dry spring. Many insects that overwinter here do better in dry springs. Cold wet weather in April and May curbs their enthusiasm for life and love. That was 2017. This is 2018 and April and May were dry and warm. They are bursting with joie de vie. We are not happy. They are intruding on these nice summer evenings, attacking us if we accidentally step near a ground nest, and generally making life miserable for bees, pets, hummingbirds, and us. But time has its revenge. Some species, like the bald-faced hornet that makes very large paper nests, only live for about 125 days. Then their clock is rung, Ms. Queen dies, newly pregnant queens depart, and the workers are on their own with no instructions. They wander off and die. The nest is permanently abandoned and is destroyed by winter weather. I have it on good authority from a guy that collects live wasps for their venom that most are already gone this year. The pregnant queens survive under brush, firewood piles, etc., waiting for another warm spring. This general cycle is true for all yellow jackets and hornets though not the 125-day timing. Lower latitude hornet nests are active longer.

But back to the present, I would not want to be a bow hunter this August. The yellow jackets will be there in force, waiting for your intrusion near their nests and the meat you might be working up. It won't be fun.

Ground nests are hard to find, especially when there are lots of them. Traps rarely work well enough and are especially useless this year given the high numbers. If you do find a ground or paper nest that is causing a problem, the aerosol "hornet and wasp killer" products do a good job if you can spray into the hole. I would leave high aerial nests alone and let them die naturally in the fall. The ground nest is also made of paper in a cavity under the ground. If the opening that leads to the actual nest makes a bend, the aerosol may not work as well. Otherwise, the spray is very effective. Skunks, raccoons, and bear



like to dig up ground nests. *Picture from Napa Vector Control.*

Food Safety or Food Preservation Questions? OSU Extension Service Has Answers.

Are you planning to preserve food from your garden or purchased from a farm this summer? If so, call or visit the OSU Extension Service office before you start canning, freezing, or drying. Costly and potentially harmful mistakes can be made by using outdated canning recipes and instructions. We can also test the accuracy of your pressure gauge. You can drop off your canner lid with gauge and pick it up later in the day. Sometimes, it might be possible to have it tested on the spot. An inaccurate gauge can lead to canning at a lower than recommended pressure which could lead to serious food poisoning concerns.

Food Preservation class series scheduled in St. Helens: They will start late August and continue through September. See page 4 for details or call our office for more information.

You can find free publications at the Columbia County Extension office located at 505 N. Columbia River Highway in St. Helens (across from the Legacy Clinic). If you have questions, phone the office at (503) 397-3462. There is a statewide Extension food preservation

hotline that you can reach Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm at 1-800-354-7319. You can download for free all our food preservation publications at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>. An additional great resource is the National Center for home Food Preservation at <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/>.

Free newsletter (what a deal!)

The Oregon State University Extension office in Columbia County publishes a monthly newsletter on gardening and farming topics (called Country Living) written/edited by yours truly. All you need to do is ask for it and it will be mailed or emailed 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.

Many Extension publications available online

Are you putting up salsa, saving seeds, or thinking about planting grapes? OSU has a large number of its publications available for free download. Just go to <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/>. Click on publications and start exploring.

Take excess produce to the food bank, senior centers, or community meals programs. Cash donations to buy food are also greatly appreciated.

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

Contact information for the Extension office

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