Gardening with Chuck for July 3 - 9, 2017

Blossom End Rot, Part II

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I recently had a panic stricken email from a home gardener because his tomatoes had blossom end rot. That's where the bottom end of the tomato starts to collapse in and turn black as it starts to ripen. The biggest culprit in blossom end rot is an imbalance between above and below ground parts of the plant (roots and shoots). Essentially it is a temporary calcium imbalance (you don't need calcium) caused by tops growing faster than the roots. Sort of the inverse of that teenage kid whose feet grow before the rest of him and he keeps tripping over everything. Eventually growth balances out and everything's fine. Yes, heavy fertilization can make it worse, but I'm all for pushing the envelope a little, especially when it comes to tomatoes which can deal with heavy fertilization. About the only time that I see an issue with over fertilization is when the plants grow like crazy but have very few blooms. At that point the nitrogen fertilization is excessive. I will say this about any fertilizer that encourages foliar feeding, don't do it, apply fertilizer to the soil! I AM NOT a fan of foliar feeding for anything other than a few micronutrients. Leaves are designed to carry on photosynthesis, roots are designed to take up water and nutrients. Other things that can exacerbate BER include soil moisture fluctuations, extreme weather changes, drought stress, root damage due to deep cultivation or waterlogged soils. Try to use nitrate forms of fertilizer like nitrate of soda, and then just be patient. While you may pitch a few tomatoes early in the season, it should get better soon. 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. Blister beetles are an interesting group of beetles that we see every year in Kansas. There are several species of blister beetles in Kansas but most of the damage in gardens is caused by the gray or striped blister beetles. They are called blister beetles because they have a caustic substance in their body fluids that if you crush one against your skin it can raise blisters. In agriculture blister beetles are a big concern because a few dead blister beetles in a bale of hay can kill a horse. In gardens there biggest threat is that they will eat the foliage of certain plants, but especially tomatoes, beans and potatoes. As a larvae, they live in the ground and feed on grasshopper eggs. The beetles frequently move in swarms of several hundred individuals and can seemingly drop out of the air into a garden, feed for a day or two and then move on. But in that day or two of feeding, they can consume half of your garden before they do move on. Blister beetles have long slender bodies with a relatively large head. If there are a lot of them on your plants, eating leaves, then they are likely blister beetles. You can try to hand pick them but beware of the aforementioned caustic body fluids. If you see quite a few you will probably want to spray them. I would try to use one of the synthetic pyrethroids like permethrin, cyfluthrin or lamda or gamma cyhalothrin. A few of these are sold as a dust that for these rascals is effective. Don't wait to treat if there are a lot of them as they can eat a lot in a hurry. Use a thorough soaking spray right on the swarms for best control. They should be gone in a day or two. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dutch Elm Disease

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In the 1960s and 70s a devastating disease called Dutch Elm Disease rolled through the United States killing American and Red Elms. In my home state of Nebraska I watched tree after tree around our farmstead succumb to this nasty disease. The same thing happened here in Kansas and the disease just worked it's way tree by tree down one street and then another. That was nearly 50 years ago so it often surprises folks to find out that we still have both red and American elms growing locally. I drive by several beautiful American elms on the way to work every day. The beetle that carries the disease isn't really attracted to trees until they get some size to them and by then the trees are producing seeds so the plants do continue to exist. While some of those old American elms could have resistance, more than likely they have simply managed to escape becoming infected. So about this time of year I start to see another set of elms showing symptoms of the disease. What typically happens is that an entire branch will flag, which means that all the leaves turn yellow and then die, often staying on the tree. Then another branch will die and then another. Sometimes part of the tree will still be alive in the fall, but will finish dying early the next growing season. Once the disease starts to manifest itself there's nothing you can do to stop it. Ideally, the entire tree should come down as soon as it starts dying. But more often homeowners wait until the entire tree is dead, and then maybe a year or two before they take it down. If you have a tree that looks suspect, give me a call! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Japanese Beetles

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There's a new pest in town - well, actually it arrived a couple years ago, but we will unfortunately be seeing more and more of them in the years ahead. The pest is the Japanese beetle. Japanese beetles are from Asia and they are in the scarab family. Their first life stage is a grub feeding on the roots of plants. But the real problem is when the adults emerge as they are quite gregarious and love to eat the leaves, flowers and even wounded or rotting fruit. This is not a big beetle - it's only a half inch long is a bright metallic green with coppery colored wing covers. Then along the edge of it's abdomen, especially towards the back of its abdomen it has a series of white dots. Unlike insects that entirely consume leaves, Japanese beetles are well known for eating the green off the surface of the leaf and leaving a nearly transparent lacelike remainder. They frequently start feeding at the tops of the plant and work their way down. If there are just a few you can shake them off, early in the morning, into a bucket of soapy water. But if you've got dozens, you may want to consider insecticides. The pyrethroids, things like permethrin, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin and cyhalothrin work very well and can give 2 to 3 weeks of protection. Since these rascals eat leaves, they will consume insecticide residue on the leaves and be controlled. There are natural predators that can be damaged by the pyrethroids so when possible, use the soapy water in a bucket method. It may be several more years before you see Japanese beetles on your plants, but trust me, they are coming! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Start planning for fall gardens

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. By the time the first of July rolls around far too many gardener have figured that the planting season is over and from here on it's just harvest what's already planted. And sadly, they are missing an awesome opportunity for a second season of gardening. Many of the vegetables that we plant early in the season, can also be planted in mid summer for fall harvest, which can last into the end of October and even early November (and later if you want to try some floating row covers. Just like spring gardening, you often have to make sure the ground is well worked up and that can mean challenges of wet soils, very dry and hard soils and everything in between. Start now and take your time. If it is dry at planting time you will need to water religiously to get the seeds up and going. More deep soaking irrigations will be required as these plants have small root systems and can dry out much more quickly in the first few weeks. Weed control is also crucial as warmer soils can allow weeds to get away from you really fast! So, for the first half of July, what can you start planting? Well, snap beans for starters - many gardeners plant a new row of snap beans every seven to ten days through June and July. Most of those cole crops can be planted now, from transplants. This includes cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. You may have to work a little at finding transplants but full service garden centers should have them. And of course, potatoes. In the second half of July you can also plant carrots and beets. Shorter season root and leafy crops need to wait until the 2nd half of August. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.