



From the Bedford VCE Master Gardener
HELP DESK

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*A monthly newsletter column written for Bedford Extension Master Gardeners.
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I seem to recall wondering in April what May's weather would bring. Now, after having gone through most of the month of May, I know: Continued Strange! Frost in May?!?!? As a Master Gardener I should have known, or at least had an inkling because of the "interesting" weather earlier this year, but I mean 'Really? Frost in May?!' As VCE Agent Scott Baker said recently, "This could be the one year in ten that we do get a frost or freeze in May." I know I had some on my freshly mown lawn.

But I digress. The growing season is upon us and with that come questions to the VCE Office MG Help Desk. Here are a few from recent years. Do the answers come immediately to you? If not, continue reading for the answers.

QUESTIONS:

- #1. A client called in stating there were brown spots in the yard (80%) and asked "What can I spray that won't harm honey bees?" Upon further questioning the client revealed that the lawn is two years old; the spots developed quickly in the spring and are spreading. She described the soil as loamy, the grass type a fescue and in full sun. Additionally it was fertilized in the spring, not compacted, and waters in evening.
- #2. A client called asking "When is the right time to prune a weeping cherry tree?"
- #3. A client called stating that squash bugs were eating her squash and wanted to know what to do about it and how to get rid of them.

ANSWERS:

#1. Tall fescue is the most common turf grass species used in home lawns in Virginia. The most common and troublesome fungal disease for tall fescue is brown patch. Brown patch occurs most frequently during warm and wet weather, typically in spring.

Excessive N fertilization in spring also increases the likelihood of disease development. One should avoid high rates of nitrogen fertilizer on cool-season grasses in the late spring and summer. The disease-causing fungus readily attacks the lush growth of grass which nitrogen promotes. In addition, avoid fast-release forms of nitrogen fertilizer. It should be noted, however, heavy brown patch infestation in conjunction with drought or heat stress can cause total plant loss.

The lawn typically recovers in the fall when managed properly. Yet another reason most fertilizer should be applied in the fall. The best approach for avoiding brown patch is good cultural practices. [1]

The client was advised to water only in the morning, preferably around sunrise; use a good fertilizer which has nitrogen sources with around 30% water-insoluble nitrogen; have the soil tested and only apply other nutrients based on soil testing recommendations; keep the lawn mown to between three and four inches in height, and apply a fungicide with one of the following active ingredients: azoxystrobin, fluoxastrobin, myclobutanil, propiconazole, thiophanate-methyl.

For optimal control, most fungicides (which are generally not harmful to honey bees) should be applied preventatively when conditions become favorable for disease development. Most common diseases of cool-season lawns occur during the summer months; most common diseases of warm-season lawns occur during the spring and fall. When to reapply chemicals depends on active ingredients, product formulation, target pests, and environmental conditions. Systemic fungicides that move acropetally within the plant typically provide control for longer than contact fungicides. [2]

#2. According to our records, the client was advised that pruning for a weeping cherry tree is best done in late winter when the tree is dormant. However, according to the 2009 VCE publication, "A Guide To Successful Pruning, Deciduous Tree Pruning Calendar", 430-460, flowering cherry trees should only be pruned in June or July. Pruning after July should be avoided because next year's flower buds have set. [3]

Generally the weeping cherry (*Prunus subhirtella* cv. *Pendula*) is a naturally pendulous, flowering tree. Sometimes weeping trees are created by grafting a weeping-type top onto a standard trunk. If this is the case for a tree in question, it is important to prune out any

branches that sprout below the graft, so these non-weeping branches don't overtake the top part. In addition, any heavy pruning can stimulate the tree to produce vigorous upright shoots called suckers. Instead, prune weeping trees by removing crowded and crossing branches and any damaged wood. Other than that, they should develop the natural weeping shape on their own. Pruning is best accomplished immediately after flowering. [4]

#3. There are a number of actions which can be taken in order to try to control squash bug infestation/damage:

Scouting: The action threshold for squash bug is when more than one egg mass is found per plant during the flowering stage. It is important to monitor plants and take appropriate actions once squash bugs have been found and control them early in the season to prevent large populations from developing. Once cucurbit yellow vine decline has infected a plant, there is nothing that can prevent the plant from dying.

Cultural Control: Mowing weeds and maintaining vegetation around field perimeters and destroying crop debris after harvest can help reduce overwintering sites for squash bugs. Vigorous vines can withstand squash bug attacks, so it is important to maintain healthy, actively growing cucurbit crops by irrigating and fertilizing them as needed. Planting varieties resistant to squash bugs (Butternut, Royal Acorn, and Sweet Cheese) is also an option to help reduce squash bug damage.

Manual Control: Home gardeners can remove squash bug eggs, adults, and nymphs manually and destroy them. Since squash bugs tend to congregate together, boards or shingles placed around the plants will promote squash bug aggregation and simplify collecting and destroying the bugs.

Biological Control: The Tachnid fly, *Trichopoda pennipes*, attacks squash bugs and occurs naturally in the field. Although parasitism rates as high as 80 percent have been reported, the fly is still unable to control squash bug populations below economically damaging levels. The fly is not available commercially.

Chemical Control: Since squash bug adults are secretive, control can be difficult. Treatment should be directed toward nymphs when possible, and thorough spray coverage should be attempted. [5]

According to the 2013 Integrated Pest Management Guide – Home & Gardens:
foliar application of Permethrin, Kaolin Clay, Potassium laurate, and Pyrethrins
can all be used to control Squash Bug nymphs.

Remember to read and follow ALL PESTICIDE LABEL WARNINGS AND INSTRUCTIONS. [6]



REFERENCES:

- [1] E-mail communication with VCE Agent Scott Baker, May 21, 2013
- [2] 2013, VCE PMG, Section 5 “Lawn Diseases,” pages 5-1 & 5-2. http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/Section_5_Lawn-1.pdf
- [3] <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-460/430-460.html>
- [4] “Pruning Weeping Cherry Trees”, National Gardening Association, accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.garden.org/searchqa/index.php?q=show&id=11692&ps=5&keyword=prune>
- [5] “Squash Bug” <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/444/444-031/444-031.html>
- [6] 2013, VCE PMG, Table 2.5 (Insects), page 2-15 – 2-16, http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/Section_2_Home_Vegetables.pdf

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The answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions.

These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances.

For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

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