



From the Bedford VCE Master Gardener HELP DESK

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*A monthly newsletter column for Bedford Extension Master Gardeners.
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In October, the calls to the Help Desk start to slow down along with the ending of the generally accepted growing season. Cooler and dryer daytime conditions beckon us outside to enjoy the weather, as well as take care of some of those end-of-season gardening chores. On the other hand, the shortening of daylight and cooler temperatures also brings on the anticipation of the annual riot of color of the trees, also known as “Fall Foliage.” Enjoy it while it lasts!

On to the Help Desk questions we go. The following are questions that have come into the VCE Office MG Help Desk within the past few years....

QUESTIONS:

1. A few years ago a lady walked into the Help Desk office on the 20th of October with “a large bug” (similar to the photo). She told us she had found it alive on her bedside table (!!!) and wanted to know what it was, and what she should do about it.



photo by Linda E.

2. The client called in late October stating she had lots of green tomatoes left on her vines and wanted to know how to store and/or ripen them.
3. A gentleman called in a few years ago in late October, complaining that his lawn was three inches high, still growing, and wanted to know how long he would have to continue mowing it.

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ANSWERS:

1. Assassin or Wheel Bug. They are considered 'good guys' and should be left alone. They are "voracious predators, preying upon a wide variety of soft-bodied insects, "ambushing them with the accuracy of an assassin." They are a valuable predator in forests and shade trees because Wheel Bugs dine on the hairy caterpillars that are defoliators." Even though a Wheel Bug may look like a dangerous insect, they are not aggressive and will avoid contact at all costs. "However, if handled, the Wheel Bug can inflict a painful bite (technically, Wheel Bugs and other types of assassin bugs do not "bite"—pierce is a more accurate term since they have needle-like sucking/piercing mouthparts). Their "bite" has been described as a "sensation lasting several minutes" or "ten times worse than a hornet sting." The site may take weeks or months to heal.

[1]

2. Green tomatoes should be harvested before the first killing frost and stored in a cool (55°F), moist (90% relative humidity) place for one to three weeks. When desired, ripen fruits at 70°F. As tomatoes start to ripen, remove them from the vicinity of the green tomatoes to prevent acceleration of ripening of the green tomatoes.

For fully vine-ripened tomatoes, harvest them while they are still firm. Picked tomatoes should be placed in shade. Light is not necessary for ripening immature tomatoes but it is necessary for color development. Fully ripened tomatoes can be stored in cool (45° to 50°F), moist (90% relative humidity) conditions. [2]

3. Lawns should be continued to be mowed until dormancy. However, from personal experience I can say that there have been some winters when the grass didn't truly stop growing at all; rather it just slowed down to a crawl. I recall a few mid-December or even mid-January when we had to get out the mower and give the lawn a "trim" just to tidy it up. I don't know whether that is recommended anywhere, but it just seems to make sense.

Linda E., VCE MG Volunteer, Help Desk Coordinator

REFERENCES:

[1] http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-09_wheel_bug.htm

[2] http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-418/426-418_pdf.pdf



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.

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / Email: Help Desk @ BedfordMG@vt.edu

Websites: www.BedfordAreaMasterGardeners.org and <http://offices.ext.vt.edu/bedford/>



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