



## GARDEN TIPS FOR JUNE!

### General Landscape

- Find someone to water plants in the house and garden while on vacation. Harvesting vegetables and mowing the lawn are a must and imply that someone is home.
- Mulch ornamentals, vegetables, and annuals to reduce soil crusting, and to regulate temperatures and moisture during hot summer months. Mulching will reduce about 70 percent of the summer yard maintenance.
- Remain alert for insect damage. Add spider mite to the list. Foliage of most plants becomes pale and speckled; juniper foliage turns a pale yellowish color. Shake a branch over white paper and watch for tiny specks that crawl. Watch for first generation fall webworm. ([EPP-7306](#))

### Turfgrass

- Fertilize warm-season grasses at 1 lb. N per 1,000 square feet. Don't fertilize fescue and other cool-season grasses during the summer.
- Dollar spot disease of lawns can first become visible in mid-May. Make certain fertilizer applications have been adequate before applying a fungicide. ([EPP-7658](#))
- Seeding of warm-season grasses should be completed by the end of June (through July for improved varieties such as Riviera and Yukon) to reduce winterkill losses. ([HLA-6419](#))
- Brown patch disease of cool-season grasses can be a problem. ([HLA-6420](#))
- White grubs will soon be emerging as adult June Beetles. Watch for high populations that can indicate potential damage from later life cycle stages as grubs in the summer.

### Fruit and Nut

- Renovate overgrown strawberry beds after the last harvest. Start by setting your lawnmower on its highest setting and mow off the foliage. Next thin crowns 12-24 inches apart. Apply recommended fertilizer, preemergence herbicide if needed and keep watered. ([HLA-6214](#))

### Trees and Shrubs

- Vigorous, unwanted limbs should be removed or shortened on new trees. Watch for forks in the main trunk and remove the least desirable trunk as soon as it is noticed. ([HLA-6415](#))
- Pine needle disease treatments are needed again in mid-June.
- Remove tree wraps during the summer to avoid potential disease and insect buildup.
- Softwood cuttings from new growth of many shrubs will root if propagated in a moist shady spot.
- Protect trees from lawnmowers and weed eaters by mulching or using protective aerated covers.

### Flowers

- Pinch back leggy annuals to encourage new growth. Fertilize and water appropriately.

- Feed established mums and other perennials.
- When picking fresh roses or removing faded ones, cut back to a leaflet facing the outside of the bush to encourage open growth and air circulation.
- Stake tall perennials before toppling winds arise.

## **Protect Tree Trunks During Summer**

David Hillock

Trees are an important aspect and investment of any landscape. Keeping them healthy through proper management and care insures they will be around for many years. Unfortunately, one of the most common stresses to urban trees is caused by humans, one that can easily be avoided.

This stress is often referred to as lawnmower or string trimmer blight – mechanical injury to the trunk of the tree by careless use of equipment near the trunk. This injury usually results in wounds that can eventually be fatal to a tree depending on severity of the damage and how often it occurs.

The trunk of a tree not only provides support to the branches and leaves, it is the main conduit for water and nutrients up and down the tree between the leaves and root system. The cambium layer, which lies just below the bark, is a thin area responsible for this movement. If damaged, the movement of this vital solution up and down the tree is hindered.

Minor damage on one side of the trunk may result in only a few stressed branches; however, if the damage surrounds the entire trunk, the tree can be sent into a slow decline. This sort of damage is only enhanced when the tree is then further stressed by environmental conditions making it difficult to recover from and return to normal growth.

The best way to address this issue is to not grow grass under the tree or at least not right up to the base of the tree. Keeping the area around the base of the tree free of grass and weeds means you don't need to mow or trim around it, which keeps the equipment a safe distance from the tree. Tree guards can be used on young trees to help protect the trunk, but it is still recommended to maintain a grass/weed free area around the tree to keep equipment safely away.



Plastic tree guards can help protect young trees from mechanical injury.



Mulched area under the canopy of a tree keeps power equipment away from trunk.

## **Pruning and Staking Tomatoes**

*David Hillock*

Every gardener has his or her own method for pruning tomatoes and also, an opinion on whether or not tomato plants require pruning. Staking tomatoes helps manage disease problems by increasing air circulation in the leaf canopy and reducing contact with the soil. A structured training system can also make tomatoes easier to harvest. Pruning can help boost yields, by exposing more of the leaf canopy to full sun and reducing competition between suckers and the developing fruit.

Several different tomato training systems exist, and the type of support to be used depends on tomato growth habit. Tomatoes can be divided into two types, determinate and indeterminate. The determinate varieties have short to medium vine lengths. Plants are heavily branched and growth stops when they start flowering. Every branch tends to end up with a flower cluster. Determinate varieties are not heavily pruned as most of the fruit is produced on the branches. Indeterminate varieties continue to grow and produce leaves as well as flowers throughout the entire growing season. Pruning methods will depend on the type of support system used.

The three most common training systems for tomatoes are stake and weave, trellis, and cage. All three of these techniques can be used with indeterminate tomato varieties, but only cages and stake-and-weave are used with determinate varieties.

Trellised tomatoes are the most heavily pruned. A trellis system consists of sturdy posts anchored in the ground about 20 feet apart. The top of the posts should be set so the tops stand six feet or more above ground level. Stretch a piece of wire between the tops of the posts. Then attach a length of sturdy twine or string above each plant in the row. Tie the twine to the base of each plant and wrap plants around the twine as they grow or tie them to the twine with plastic ties. You can train one or two stems per plant, using a separate cord for each stem. Plants are pruned back to these main shoots, with 2 to 4 side shoots along the main stem.

When we prune tomatoes we remove small side shoots from the main stem. This reduces competition between vegetative growth and the fruit. Pruned plants produce larger and an earlier fruit as most of the plant energy is channeled into the fruit. Prune shoots when they are four inches long. It can be more difficult to remove larger shoots and you are more likely to damage the plant when removing large shoots. Remove a sucker by grasping it between your thumb and second finger and bending it to the side until it breaks. It is advisable to do this early in the day when the plant is still crisp. Do not cut suckers with a knife or pruners as this can lead to spread of diseases. Limit the branches of indeterminate varieties to two to three fruit producing branches by selecting the

main stem, the sucker that develops immediately below the first flower cluster, and another sucker below that. Remove all other suckers, and periodically remove additional suckers that develop on the selected branches. The stake and weave method is commonly used with determinate tomato varieties, but also works with indeterminate tomatoes. Staking plants requires metal or wooden stakes.

The wooden stakes need to be at least one inch square for support. You can also use rebar or t-posts as stakes. Determinate varieties require three to four feet long stakes and indeterminate varieties require stakes that are five to six feet long. Set a stake between every other plant. Lines of twine are strung between stakes on either side of the plants to provide support. Twine must be resistant to weather and stretching, and have sufficient "grip" to wrap tightly around stakes. String the first line 8-10 inches above the ground by securing the twine to an end stake, and wrapping the twine around each stake until the row is completed. Loop around this end stake and complete the stringing on the other side of the plant row. Run the next row of twine 6-8 inches above the first row before plants begin to fall over. Prune plants back to keep them more or less contained within the stake and weave system and from crowding one another. Remove the lowest branches, as these are most likely to become infected by soil-borne diseases.

Caging is a support system that requires less work than staking or trellising, but provides similar benefits in protecting plants from contact with the soil. Caged plants may not produce ripe tomatoes as early as staked or trellised plants, but the fruits they produce are less likely to suffer from cracking or sunburn. It will be necessary to lift branches and direct them upwards through the cage. Again, prune the lowest branches to reduce disease.

It is important to decide on type of support before setting plants in the garden. Plants grown on a trellis system can be planted closer together than those grown in cages or staked. Check your plants regularly to continue training them to the support system and prune as needed.

Source: Oklahoma Gardening segment, June 4 – 5, 2011, Information Sheet (#3749)

## **Tomato Blossom Drop or Poor Fruit Set**

*David Hillock*

Poor fruit set or blossom drop occurs on tomatoes for any of several reasons.

1. Extreme temperatures: the blossoms drop off without setting fruit when night temperatures fall below 55°F or day temperatures rise above 90°F for an extended period of time.
2. Dry soil: blossoms dry and fall when the plants don't receive enough water.
3. Shading: few blossoms are produced when the plants receive less than six hours of sunlight a day.
4. Excessive nitrogen: high levels of nitrogen in the soil promote leaf growth at the expense of blossom and fruit formation.

To avoid or correct these problems take these measures.

1. Plant early-, mid-, and late-season varieties at the appropriate time of year.
2. Water tomatoes regularly, never allowing the soil to dry out. Mulch with straw, black plastic or other material to reduce moisture loss.
3. Plant tomatoes in an area that receives at least six hours of sunlight each day. If the yard is too shady, plant the tomatoes in a container and set them on a sunny porch or patio.
4. Reduce nitrogen applications if necessary. Be sure to follow the fertilizer application recommendations.

## **Insect Hotels: Good Bugs Check In AND They Check Out**

*Eric Rebek, Extension Entomologist*

From backyard gardeners to large-scale producers, more and more folks are becoming interested in insect conservation. You might be asking, “Why would anyone want to encourage greater numbers of those creepy crawlies?” The short answer is even if they give you the chills, not all insects are pests—in fact, less than 1% of all insect species on planet Earth are considered pests (i.e., those that compete with us for food and fiber or cause us harm). So, what about the other 99%? They either serve as an important food source for vertebrate predators or they benefit us directly.

A couple of these insect-derived benefits include pollination and natural pest control.

Every gardener and farmer appreciates these important ecological services as their crops, and livelihood, often depend on them. There are myriad strategies available to conserve these “good guys” in our landscapes, ranging from polycultural plantings of mixed crops to modified (reduced) pesticide use (see OCES publication E-1023: Conserving Beneficial Arthropods in Residential Landscapes). Here, I will focus on one conservation technique for home gardeners that integrate science and art: insect hotels.

Insect hotels are simple structures that provide shelter to a wide variety of beneficial arthropods, including bees, wasps, lady beetles, and spiders. These bug-friendly structures are often constructed from scraps of wood, brick, bamboo, plant pots, and other leftover landscaping/gardening materials. Gardeners can tap their creative energy and design insect hotels to be aesthetically pleasing and tailored to their landscape. Beneficial arthropods are attracted to insect hotels because they require shelter for nesting or overwintering. Thus, the design of insect hotels should accommodate these requirements.



Native pollinators such as solitary bees and wasps require nesting sites that are often lacking in well-manicured lawns and landscapes. To attract these beneficials, insect hotels should have lots of nooks and crannies with deep recesses. These nesting sites can be created from stacked bamboo, old pots, masonry, and wood pieces drilled with holes of various diameters. Spiders, lady beetles, and other predators require hiding places and/or overwintering sites, which can be provided by adding straw, fallen leaves, pine cones, and sticks. For lots of design ideas, see the following website: <http://www.inspirationgreen.com/insect-habitats.html>. After visiting this site, I'm totally inspired to repurpose lots of old scraps, landscaping material, and yard waste lying around my garage to construct my own insect hotel this spring!

For more information about conserving native pollinators, including bumble bees, visit the University of Florida's "Native Buzz" project page (see references below). Also, information about specific nesting requirements and do-it-yourself bee boxes can be found by visiting the website of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (see references below).



The *Horticulture Tips* newsletter distributed monthly (except January) by the following:

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