

## **It's Been a Tough Summer!**

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We still have about a month to go but it's already been a tough summer! All sorts of challenges from weather and insects so today we'll just go through some of the bigger issues we've been facing in recent weeks.

Many gardeners have been asking me about garden plants blooming but not setting fruit. Two groups of plants have been mentioned most frequently, tomatoes/peppers and vine crops. In the case of tomatoes it's all about the heat. When we have daytime temperatures over 90 and especially nighttime temperatures above 75, the tomato flowers literally self destruct from the heat. They keep blooming, they just don't set. Just keep the plants healthy, growing and blooming. Once we get a break in the weather you should get a new round of fruit setting on. While peppers may not be quite as sensitive to the temperatures, the heat will impact fruit set and development as well!

In the case of vine crops the most common cause of no fruit is gardener impatience. Vine crops have separate male and female flowers. Male flowers greatly outnumber female flowers and can start blooming a couple of weeks earlier. Male flowers are on a thin filament while female flowers are attached to the vine by a miniature version of the fruit. Just keep the plants healthy and the insects (squash bugs especially) off the plants so they keep blooming. Eventually the plants will start bearing fruit. Also remember that vine crops need pollinators like bees. Limit your spraying for insect control to very early morning or late evening when pollinators are less active.

Two greenish colored scarab beetles have become an annual nuisance in our area: the Japanese beetle and the green June beetle. Green June beetles are native to our area but in recent years have become more abundant. Japanese beetles are not native to Kansas or the United States and have slowly been working their way west across the country since they were introduced. Both develop from white grubs feeding in the decaying roots of old tree stumps or on grass roots in the lawn. As larvae they aren't really very damaging, but as adults, both can be a real problem.

Green June beetles are quite fond of feeding on ripening fruit. Peaches, pears, apples are all high on their list of favorite foods but just about any ripening fruit may be at risk and even sweet corn! They'll likely be active through most of the month. You have to get the spray right on them to control them. Neem oil may have some repellency. Otherwise use fruit tree sprays that have the fruit that they are attacking on the label. Japanese beetles are more prone to feeding on foliage and flowers of many ornamental plants and trees. Fortunately, their activity should be slowing down soon as they get to the end of their adult life span. If you are still seeing foliar feeding damage then spray with a lawn and garden insecticide labeled for the plant they are feeding on.

Just now starting to show up is fall webworm which are those insects that get in the big webby mass in the ends of branches of trees. These look really horrible and the bags tend to linger on well after the leaves have fallen from the trees. Fortunately, due to how late they appear, they really aren't damaging to the trees health and well being. Best thing to do is nothing. Just let them be; don't flame them, don't cut them out, don't waste time trying to spray them. Just leave them alone. Also be aware that due to heat and periodic dry spells, many tree species may be shedding a lot of leaves at this time. Again, this late in the season, it's not an issue.