

Clark County Horticulture Newsletter

From the Ground Up!

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A Word from the Agent...

Happy June my friends! I hope life is treating you well and you are enjoying all of what the spring offered to us.

As we begin to move into summer, remember to keep trees and shrubs that you may have planted this spring watered. Consider visiting the Winchester/Clark County Farmers Market one Saturday. With more vendors than before, you are sure to find something good. And don't forget about the Clark County Fair! Consider entering something into the Home Economics exhibits, and you might win a little money!

Reach out any time you have questions, that's what I'm here for!

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**Check out the upcoming
Bee Field Day
inside this newsletter!**



The Bite of the Bird Mite

By Jonathan L. Larson, Entomology Extension Specialist

This week, an interesting case was submitted from a Kentucky Extension agent involving a client who reported feeling insect bites to her face while she was trying to sleep. The client was able to capture some of the pests and bring them in for identification. Instead of turning out to be one of our more common biting pests, such as bed bugs, fleas, or lice, this sample contained small mites most often called “bird mites.” Bird mite is a broad term that could encompass several species, though the most common one found bothering people is the northern fowl mite.

What are bird mites?

Bird mites are tiny blood feeding parasites that are usually found living and feeding on poultry or wild birds, like starlings, sparrows, and pigeons. As a mite, they have eight legs, and they have a pale yellow-grey color (which can be darker after they have taken a blood meal). Despite their size, they are visible to the naked eye.

Why would they bite people?

It is relatively rare for people to be bitten by bird mites. The instances where it does happen may involve people who own chickens or pet birds that become infested, leading to the mites also biting the people. The other possible route of exposure would involve a bird nest present on or near the home, and the birds in the nest either fledging and leaving or the birds may have died. This can lead to some mites being left behind or migrating away from the nest and then finding some people nearby. Bites usually result in raised and inflamed welts similar to other arthropod bites.

Bird mites *cannot* infest humans the way they do birds. Bird mite issues for humans are transitory; the mites cannot survive by feeding on human blood alone and will not establish a breeding population without a bird present.



Figure 1: One of the mites submitted in the sample. The oval shape, eight legs, and coloration help to distinguish this pest from others (Photo: Jonathan Larson, UK).



Are there management tips?

If someone is experiencing problems with bird mites, the best course of action is to remove the bird nest (given that the nest is not of a protected species of bird) and sanitize the area near the nest. This usually involves cleaning a window and windowsill near the infested nest. Using cleaning wipes and a vacuum cleaner will remove most of the mites. Don't leave the mites inside the vacuum cleaner, though; they could crawl out and become an issue again.

Insecticides can be applied to the problem area as well. Liquid products labelled for homes and buildings (for example, Ortho Home Defense) will create a barrier between the nest and the window/home, while dust products could be put into cracks and crevices to try and intercept mites. No insecticides should be applied to the body or to sleeping areas. Running bedding through the dryer on high heat for 30 minutes should also kill any mites hanging out there.

ARRANGING

Cut Flowers



College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service



Take
your
flower
arrangement
home!

TUESDAY, JULY 25

OR

~~THURSDAY, JULY 27~~
FULL!

ONLY
19
SPOTS
LEFT!

6:30 pm

Clark County Extension Service

Hands on experience of making an arrangement of fresh cut flowers to take home!

Instructor: Derrick Knight, FFA Advisor and GRCHS Teacher

To register, call the Extension Office at 859-744-4682 or email cynthia.carr@uky.edu

The disadvantages of landscape fabric

Landscape fabric. It's what goes under the mulch. Right? I've had several conversations with home gardeners looking for a permanent solution to keeping the weeds down and each time I warn them about the use of landscape fabric.

If you're thinking, "Hang on! Landscape fabric doesn't work?" Of course, you've seen people on TV and perhaps watched professional landscapers roll out the black landscape fabric before spreading mulch. And why does every garden center sell the stuff if it doesn't work?

The Scoop on Landscape Fabric

Here's the thing: Landscape fabric does help to suppress weeds, but only for a couple of years. Additionally, over time it may actually do more harm than good to your plants. Let's examine the background of landscape fabric and what's happening under the mulch.

Landscape fabric was initially developed for the commercial world. Commercial vegetable growing and holding soil when building something structural like a retaining wall. The main selling points for landscape fabric are it is permeable, prevents weeds from growing, and is permanent. Let's look at each of these points.

Permeability: At the store, landscape fabric usually can be found in two forms: 1) a woven fabric created by weaving thin strips of plastic and 2) a spun fabric created using polyester fibers. These landscape fabrics are somewhat porous in both cases, meaning they allow water and air to move through. Being porous is important as water and air are critical resources for plant roots.

You may have noticed I wrote "somewhat porous". There different grades and thickness levels of landscape fabric that all affect porosity, but either way it still creates a restriction of water and air movement. And over time it has been demonstrated, landscape fabric pores will trap dirt and other sediments, making them even less permeable. In fact, I've pulled up landscape fabric after a deep soaking rain, only to find dry soil beneath.

Prevents Weeds: Every time you disturb the soil, you create an opportunity for weed seeds to germinate. Those seeds are already in the soil waiting for the perfect conditions to sprout. When I go in to install a new landscape bed, there is a lot of soil disturbance occurring. There may be tilling. Bringing in amendments. Digging in new landscape lighting or irrigation. And of course, installing plants. One way to avoid that initial flush of weeds is to cover the soil. Yes, mulch can do the trick, but most people don't put it on thick enough and the professionals can use less mulch if they add landscape fabric on top of the soil. The fabric suppresses the weeds for a couple of years, but eventually, new weed seeds blow into the landscape bed. Or a few particularly tenacious weeds manage to grow right through the fabric. If an organic mulch was installed on top of the landscape fabric, that begins to decompose, but cannot be incorporated into the native soil because of the fabric. Only after a few years, pulling a weed may also bring up sections of the fabric and you'll be cursing the stuff!

Permanent: While most landscape fabrics are comprised of some type of plastic fiber, they are not permanent. Some cheaper fabrics will degrade in the soil,

while others get pulled up by the gardener pulling up a weed. And if you like to plant lots of annuals in your landscape beds, you will wind up with Swiss cheese landscape fabric as you must cut holes to reach the soil beneath for the plant roots.

Are there alternatives to landscape fabric?

So what, if anything, can be used under the mulch? Here are few other alternatives to landscape fabrics:

Newspaper: Many homes have a pile of old newspapers and if not old papers can often be picked up at the newspaper printer. Some commercial garden suppliers are now offering newsprint in large rolls. A preference for using newspaper is that it is not permanent. The newsprint should decompose over time, so it shouldn't become a barrier to planting say a flat of annuals. Use only a couple of sheets thick as too much newsprint could lead to an impermeable barrier. Avoid using glossy paper inserts.

Cardboard: Lots of gardeners use cardboard, but I would offer some words of caution with this material. Cardboard is often covered in tape, stickers, and other labels. These are coated in plastic, don't decompose quickly, and often work their way to the surface. Some cardboards are also coated in wax or plastic material. This prevents water from moving to the soil. And plain cardboard can also act as a water barrier. I have used in my garden to smother weeds and when I've watered plants surrounded by cardboard, the majority of the water sheds off and doesn't move into the soil beneath. This runoff is especially bad if the cardboard is dry. If you still plan to use cardboard, make sure it is not coated, remove any labels and staples, and cut a wide enough hole around your plants to make sure water can get through to the roots.

Plastic: Truly the wrong direction to take, but I see plastic sheets go down all the time under mulch. We really don't need more plastic in the environment. Unless you're building a pond, just steer clear of this stuff.

Wood Mulch: Yes, the very stuff you usually install on top of landscape fabric, just more of it. Up to six inches on new landscape beds can help suppress that first flush of weeds. Not all wood mulch is created equal. Shredded mulch fibers tend to knit together over time and create a shell that needs to be cultivated at least once per year. Large or coarse wood chips tend not to create a mulch shell and allow water and air to move into the soil. A lot more gardeners are utilizing arborist wood chips, which are typically chipped into coarse sizes and often free.

Clark / Powell
**Bee Field
Day**

Saturday, June 3

10:00 am to 2:00 pm
Clark County Extension
back parking lot

Lite lunch will be provided!

Hands-on Day!



Bring Veil and ALL Protective Gear!

Build a queen
starter/finisher

Look at mites
under microscope

Make 1st Aid Kit
for bees



Gus'


QUICK TIPS


for

JUNE

- 1 Prune evergreen shrubs now through late August. The longer you can tolerate leaving this year's growth on the plant, the more energy the plant will create equaling a healthier plant. This also means less of a chance of a second trimming.
- 2 Mound soil around potato plants to improve quality. We call this hilling.
- 3 Thin fruits on fruit trees when they reach the size of a dime. Leave one fruit for every 6-8" of branch.
- 4 Mow grass at three inches for a healthier lawn. Leave clippings on lawn for a natural source of fertilizer.
- 5 Use chemical controls as a last resort. Patrol plants regularly for insects and hand pick before populations explode. If you must resort to chemicals avoid spraying during the heat of the day and ALWAYS read and follow label directions.
- 6 Remove flower buds from culinary herbs to keep them growing and productive.
- 7 Keep mower blades sharpened. Clean cuts make for less disease problems and easier mowing for you. And we are all about keeping things easy!
- 8 Mulch plants for the summer. It will conserve moisture in hot weather and prevent weeds from growing.
- 9 Keep gardens and beds well weeded. Weeds compete for light and nutrients, reducing yields. By preventing weeds from setting seed you will lessen weed problems in future years.
- 10 Pinch chrysanthemums back every few weeks until mid July. This will promote fuller bushier plants that are less likely to fall over when in bloom.
- 11 Start planning your fall vegetable plantings now. Many cool season crops like lettuce, peas, and cole crops will be finished from the spring planting and can be planted again in late July and August for a fall crop.

what's
cooking





Cabbage Jambalaya

1 pound lean ground beef	1 (13 ounces) package turkey smoked sausage, sliced	1 (14.5 ounces) can diced tomatoes
1 ½ cups chopped celery	2 cups water	1 cup brown rice
1 ½ cups chopped onion	1 medium head cabbage, chopped (about 10 cups)	1 teaspoon garlic powder
2 cloves garlic, minced	1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning	

Heat a large stockpot over medium high. **Add** ground beef, and **cook** until it starts to brown, about 6 minutes. **Add** the celery, and **cook** for 2 minutes. **Add** onion and garlic, and **cook** 4 minutes while stirring. **Add** smoked sausage, and **cook** an additional 2 to 3 minutes. **Stir in** cabbage, and **cook** until it wilts, about 3 minutes. **Add** tomatoes, water, rice, garlic powder, and Cajun seasoning.

Bring to a **boil**, and **reduce** heat to medium. **Cover**, and **simmer** for 40 minutes. Serve hot.

Yield: 10, 1-cup servings

Nutritional Analysis:
250 calories, 8 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 60 mg cholesterol, 400 mg sodium, 26 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 6 g sugars, 0 g added sugars, 18 g protein