Currituck Garden News

September 2014

Why Do Ants Climb Trees?

Have you ever wondered why ants climb trees? Most ants don't live in trees so they don't have any reason to be up there. So why do ants climb trees?

Aphids and soft scale insects produce an abundance of honeydew as they feed on trees. Honeydew is a sweet, sticky liquid produced by insects that ingest large quantities of plant sap. Scale insects can cause considerable damage to trees. High scale populations can remove more food than the tree produces forcing the plant to survive on reserved energy that is gradually depleted. Over time this can weaken the tree causing limbs to die and potentially kill the tree. Honeydew can also lead to sooty mold that covers the leaves interfering with photosynthesis which further weakens the tree.

Ants love to feed on honeydew. To protect their food source, ants will tend to aphid and scale insects in trees. Ants will protect scales and aphids from natural predators and move pests to better food sources or more favorable microclimates to maximize honeydew production. Predators such as lacewing larvae, ladybug larvae and parasitic wasps are natural enemies of aphid and scale insects. Aphids and scales are often well controlled by beneficial predators and parasites, except when these natural enemies are disrupted by ants. Controlling the ants, may be enough to bring about gradual control of aphids and scales as natural enemies become more abundant.

Ants can be controlled by using Tanglefoot (a sticky substance that creates a physical barrier). Do not apply Tanglefoot directly to the tree trunk as it may damage the plant. Apply it to a strip of fabric or duct tape (sticky side out) wrapped around the trunk. If the ants persist, you can use baits or apply pesticides to the base of the plant. These strategies target the ants while limiting exposure to natural enemies.

Top: Ladybug larvae feeding on aphids.

Bottom Left: An ant eating honeydew collected from a scale insect. Photo by Alex Wild, myrmecos.net

Bottom Right: Ants tending aphids.

Please Share This Newsletter

The Garden News is published to provide you with educational information, upcoming programs and opportunities on gardening issues. Feel free to share with others.

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Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale

The Currituck Master Gardeners will hold their annual Fall Plant Sale on Saturday, September 27th from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at the NC Cooperative Extension, Currituck County Center in Barco. The Master Gardeners will have mums, ornamental cabbage and pansies for sale in a wide variety of colors. A large assortment of trees, shrubs, and perennials will also be available at great prices. This year the Coastal NC Daylily Society will also be participating. They will be selling daylily plants as a fund raiser for the organization. There will be dozens of colorful daylilies to chose from. The Extension Center is located at 120 Community Way, off of Hwy 158 next to the YMCA.

Growing Citrus

Join us on October 2, 2014 at 1:00 pm for a class on growing cold hardy citrus. The class will be held at NC Cooperative Extension, Currituck County Center at 120 Community Way in Barco.

The class is free and open to everyone.

Our guest speaker, Ozzie Coor will have Mandarin orange, Key lime, Meyer lemon and pink grapefruit trees for sale after the class.

NE NC Daffodil Society

The fall meeting of the Northeast North Carolina Daffodil Society will be held at NC Cooperative Extension, Currituck County Center located at 120 Community Way in Barco on Saturday October 25, 2014. Registration for the meeting will start at 9:30 am. The meeting will be called to order at 10:00 am and end at 2:00 pm. The morning will start with a short business meeting followed by recognition of new members and those who worked at the spring show. Our featured speaker is Ms. Glenna Graves American Daffodil Society (ADS) member, ADS accredited daffodil judge and instructor. Glenna has been show chairperson as well as President of the Garden Club of Virginia, and the Washington Daffodil Society. She has been very active with ADS and many of its national and east coast daffodil shows. Ms. Graves will speak on growing show quality daffodils. The speaker will be followed by a bulb exchange and a pot luck lunch. The public is invited. Membership is encouraged. Come enjoy the day with daffodils.

Top: Armyworm damage.

Middle: Adult moth.

Bottom: Armyworm.

Fall Armyworms on the Move

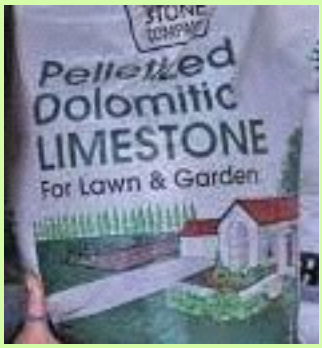
If one side of your lawn turned brown overnight, you might have an armyworm infestation. Armyworms strongly prefer grasses but will occasionally feed on various fruits, vegetables and weeds. Because they usually feed at night, armyworms can cause a lot of damage before they are detected. Armyworms march across lawns devouring all the foliage in their path. During daylight hours they hide on the ground under leaf litter. The adult moth first appears in May or June. The females lay thousands of eggs in small clusters on the leaf sheaths of grasses. The eggs hatch 1 to 3 weeks later and the larvae feed for 3 to 4 weeks before dropping to the ground to pupate in the soil. Several generations are produced each year.

Parasites and predators usually keep armyworm populations under control but a cold, wet spring can cause populations to build up. If you suspect you might have an armyworm problem, you can check for caterpillars using a soap solution. The soap solution consists of two tablespoons of liquid dishwashing detergent mixed in two gallons of water. Slowly pour from a bucket or sprinkling can the whole contents onto approximately a square yard (3 ft X 3 ft) area and then observe closely over the next few minutes for the fall armyworms (and any other caterpillars present) scrambling to the top of the turfgrass. Large fall armyworms are difficult to control. If the worms are very large (inch and a half long) then they will soon be going into the soil to pupate and control efforts may be ineffective. If treatment is necessary, carbaryl (Sevin), spinosad (Conserve) or pyrethroids (Deltaguard, Bug-B-Gone) can be used. Read and follow all directions on the product label carefully.

For more information about fall army worms see:
http://go.ncsu.edu/armyworm

Fall Vegetable Gardening

Many of our gardens are looking rough by the middle of September. Heat, drought and weeds can certainly take a toll on summer vegetable crops and gardeners. But for some of us, who are still feeling ambitious, its not to late to plant some fall crops. Now is a great time to plant kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard greens, onions, radish and turnips. Most of these crops will reach maturity and be ready to harvest in 40 to 60 days. Radishes will be ready in 25 to 30 days. Onion sets will take a little longer and may not be ready for 80 days. For those gardeners who are ready to turn it all under and put the garden to rest, September is a great time to plant a crimson clover cover crop. If you are planning to send in a soil sample for analysis, consider doing it now. After Thanksgiving, there will be a $4 fee per sample. Testing now will not only save you money, but the lab will make recommendations for applying lime (if needed) just in time for a fall application. Lime applied in the fall has several months to take effect and provide a perfect pH for your spring planting. Lime applied in the spring will not provide much benefit for your garden until the following year.



For additional information on any of the contents of this newsletter call or email Debbie Foster at 252-232-2262, **deborah_kelso@ncsu.edu**

Deborah E. Foster
Agriculture Technician

Mission, Vision and Goals

North Carolina Cooperative Extension partners with communities to deliver education and technology that enrich the lives, land and economy of North Carolina.

For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact the Currituck County Center at 252-232-2262 no later than five business days prior to the event.

Lawn Care

Raise the mowing height for Bermuda and Centipede lawns 1/2" in late September to protect the lawn from winter kill. To minimize Spring Dead Spot, do not over fertilize Bermuda lawns. Use a low nitrogen, high potassium fertilizer like 5-10-30. For Centipede and Zoysia lawns do not apply nitrogen at this time. Use a potassium fertilizer such as 0-0-50 instead. Do not fertilize St. Augustine lawns after August 31. Check for thatch in September. If the thatch layer is 3/4" thick, plan to dethatch in the spring. Apply preemergence herbicides to control winter annual weeds like chickweed and henbit. Fertilize Fescue lawns with a complete fertilizer such as 12-4-8 or 16-4-8. Fescue lawns need a pound of nitrogen / 1000 sq. ft in September and November.

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