



June-July
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876 Skyland Dr. Suite 206
Sylva, N.C. 28779
828-586-4009
jackson.ces.ncsu.edu



Night Invaders

Home Gardening Newsletter

Most pests that commonly invade our garden are easily spotted and feed during the daytime. Colorado potato beetles and Mexican bean beetles are a few examples that chew and chomp on potatoes and beans throughout the day. While many insects both good and bad are active throughout the day, some pests invade our beloved gardens after dark. These “dark invaders” are tricky to find and identify but, with careful observations one can narrow the list of night feeding “storm troopers” to beetles, caterpillars, earwigs and or slugs. The following describes various examples, signs and evidence to help you distinguish among these four groups.



Caterpillars typically leave small pellet like fecal droppings under the leaves or around the damage. Some caterpillars make webbing. Observed damage ranges from numerous small holes to the removal of large portions of the leaf. Caterpillars known as cutworms feed at night on both stems and leaves. During the day look for the cutworms curled up just under the soil surface near plant stems. Cutworms are medium sized caterpillars that hide in the soil during the day and come out at night to feed. Cutworm damage is unique in that these insects will clip small stems and branches that is oftentimes confused with rabbit feeding. Protect plants by placing cardboard tubes or aluminum foil around the plant. Extend the tubes or foil a couple of inches below and above the soil line. Bacillus thuringiensis or Bt is an organic option for controlling young caterpillars while Spinosad works well for adults.

The 2nd group of night invaders belongs to beetles. Beetles are not as likely to leave droppings and often escape notice by falling to the ground. Beetles fall in response to leaves being moved as you look for them. Carefully examine under the leaves for signs of egg clusters and tiny larvae. Rose chafers are beetles that not only feed on roses but also invade and feed on grapes, strawberries, and raspberries. Oftentimes, rose leaves are skeletonized with large holes between the leaf veins. Rose chafers may be controlled by picking them off and throwing them in soapy water or creating a physical barrier e.g., row covers over the plants in the spring-time until after the threat of damage is over.

The 3rd group, earwigs are known to damage vegetable seedlings, corn silk and soft fruit. Earwigs will chew numerous holes in the leaves of many kinds of vegetables. Younger leaves may have holes all over the leaf while older leaves are chewed along the edges having a ragged appearance.

Other difficult to see invaders include birds, rabbits, voles, groundhogs, deer, squirrels and raccoons. All will eat leaves or fruits of plants in vegetable gardens. Symptoms include:

- large parts of the plant are chewed off
- leaves are nibbled; stems cut,
- new growth is uniformly nibbled off
- plants are eaten to the ground
- fruits are damaged or removed



If slugs or snails are suspect, look for slime trails as a clue to their presence. Slime helps protect their bodies from desiccation and a residue often remains where the slug has crawled. Snails may travel several feet from a plant to hide in a dark, moist place during the day.

To help determine what animal is causing the damage, sprinkle a layer of finely ground limestone around the damaged plants and look for animal tracks left in the powder the next day. Control options include scare tactics, traps, fencing, repellents and more depending on the culprit in question.



Pruning Tips for Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas are a beloved landscape plant and especially so with the newer hybrids. There are more than 100 different varieties, including the climbing hydrangea, large oak-leafed varieties, red-stemmed choices and hydrangeas with pure white blooms. Because there are oodles of cultivars it's helpful to categorize hydrangeas in one of five groupings: Bigleaf hydrangea (*H. macrophylla*), Climbing hydrangea (*H. anomala*), Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*), Panicked or Peegee hydrangea (*H. paniculata*), and Smooth hydrangea *H. arborescens*).

The prevalent hydrangea is the big-leaf hydrangea, *Hydrangea macrophylla*. This "older" cultivar is typically pink or blue, depending on soil pH. Acidic soils produce blue flowers and alkaline soils produce pink petals. Aluminum uptake from the soil to the roots is responsible for color change.

The general rule for pruning hydrangeas is to trim spring blooming shrubs after they flower and summer blooming shrubs in late winter. Remember azaleas? Hybrid azaleas bloom in the spring and then without delay set flowering buds for next year. So pruning "post bloom" is the best option. Summer flowering plants bloom on wood that grows in the summer, so by pruning in the winter, you avoid removing any flowering buds.

Hydrangea species vary in the type of wood they bloom on, making pruning decisions a bit more difficult! With this in mind, it's important to know the category type your hydrangea falls into and go from there!

Hydrangea macrophylla - French or Bigleaf Hydrangeas

There are two main reasons why bigleaf hydrangeas fail to bloom. The cultivars were developed for areas with a warmer climate than geared for Jackson and Swain counties, or the hydrangeas were pruned at the wrong time of year. Bigleaf hydrangeas set flower buds on old wood. Old wood develops in late summer and fall. When pruning is done any time after flower buds form, the next summer's blooms are removed. Thus the safest time to prune bigleaf hydrangeas is immediately after flowering.

The color of Bigleaf Hydrangea flowers are directly affected by pH. Acid soils will cause Bigleaf Hydrangeas to bloom blue and alkaline soils will cause the plant to bloom pink.

Hydrangea quericifolia

The flowers on Oakleaf hydrangeas are produced on old wood from last year's growth. Typically flowers bloom in June, but persist through the summer and gradually change from white to pink, and eventually to a tan in the winter. If needed, prune after flowering to maintain a desired size and shape. Winter killed or other dead wood can be removed any time.



Hydrangea paniculata & Hydrangea arborescens

Both panicked and smooth hydrangea such as Annabelle bloom on new wood, or wood grown in spring and early summer. These can be pruned after fall frost and still flower the following summer. Some growers cut their 'Annabelle's' to the ground each winter in order to have flower heads on three to four foot straight stems the next summer.

Climbing hydrangeas are vigorous growers that bloom on old wood. The only necessary pruning is to remove unwanted stray stems for growth control. This may need to be repeated several times in the season as the vine quickly produces new stems. To avoid reducing bloom, prune them after blooming.

Western North Carolina often experiences "early spring" only to have new growth hit by a cold snap! Pruning at the correct time may not ensure hydrangea blooms each year.

June Horticulture Tips



Lawns

- Avoid watering a cool season lawn unless you're able to keep it adequately watered all summer.
- Avoid mowing the grass when wet to avoid spreading disease.



Vegetables

- Plant beans, lima beans, beets, carrots, Swiss chard, corn, cucumbers, okra, southern peas, pumpkins, and turnips.
- Side-dress vegetables 6 weeks after planting.
- Assure that vegetables get a least one inch of water per week. Avoid watering the foliage late in the day. Consider drip irrigation.
- While squash plants are still small, apply *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) to stems weekly to prevent squash vine borers. Scout for insects. Hand pick, or if necessary use the least environmentally harmful insecticides.
- Spray tomatoes weekly with fungicide(s) to minimize early blight and late blight diseases.
- Start Brussels sprouts and collards for transplanting into the garden in mid-July.
- Dig new potatoes when tops begin to die down.
- Plant pumpkins for Halloween.

Fruits

- Protect blueberries and raspberries with bird netting.
- Renovate strawberry beds after the berry harvest is completed.
- Continue fungicide/insecticide sprays on fruit trees and grape vines.
- Remove suckers and water sprouts from fruit trees.



Trees Shrubs & Flowers

- Water newly planted or highly valued trees and shrubs if needed. Apply enough water to soak in at least 10 inches deep.
- Prune out dieback on rhododendron, azalea, and mountain laurel.
- Remove foliage of spring flowering bulbs after foliage has dies back. Bulbs can be thinned out or moved at this time.
- Remove dead flowers in flower beds to encourage longer flowering.
- Install supports for tall-growing flowers before they start to flop.
- Pinch back chrysanthemums to develop bushy plants with more flowers.
- Cut off the faded flowers of perennials to encourage a second flowering.



Miscellaneous Tasks

- Keep hummingbird feeders cleaned and filled.
- Apply herbicides to the following woody weeds: poison ivy, honeysuckle, bittersweet, multiflora rose and kudzu.

Upcoming Bee Events

Jackson Bee Chapter - This new and growing bee chapter has their monthly meetings every 3rd Tuesday of the month (June 18 & July 16), 7:00 p.m. at the Jackson Extension Center located on 876 Skyland Dr. Sylva, N.C. All those interested in Beekeeping are most welcome! Find them on FaceBook!

Smoky Mountain Beekeepers - New and veteran beekeepers from Swain and neighboring areas meet the 2nd Thursday of the month (June 13 & July 11), 7:00 p.m. at the Swain Extension Center on 60 Almond School Rd.(SCC Bldg.). For more information go to website: smokymtnbeekeepr.com



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Sincerely,
Christy Bredenkamp, Extension Agent
Agriculture-Horticulture



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EXTENSION



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Jackson County Center
876 Skyland Dr. Suite 6
Sylva, NC 28779