Master Gardener Foundation
Grays Harbor & Pacific Counties, Washington

Pest Corner

July, 2008

Adapted by Cecilia from information compiled by Don Tapio, GH County Extension Agent.

Scotch Broom is in Bloom

Its vivid yellow inflorescence reminds us of its invasive growth habit. Introduced early on as a garden ornamental, it continues to spread beyond easy control west of the Cascades from British Columbia to California. The general public should be aware of the need to eradicate it from gardens and open land to prevent its fire hazard potential during dry weather season.

Controls include: Browsing by domestic goats; grubbing of the crowns; repeated cultivation to remove seedlings; continuous cutting and/or mowing of the plants to ground level after flowering stage to prevent formation of seeds. Selected herbicides recommended by WSU include triclopyr and glyphosate, **used per label instructions.**

Because Scotch broom is insect pollinated, and the pollen is heavy and sticky, the potential for airborne allergy-causing material is minimal. Most allergenic reactions which result in "hay fever" symptoms are the result of wind-borne pollen, such as grass pollen which is present in large amounts at about the same that Scotch Broom is in bloom.

Horsetail

A recurrent weed that survives repeated eradication attempts, plants will weaken by keeping them hoed off every time they reach three inches high.

If horsetail is growing among landscape shrubs with woody roots like rhododendrons and azaleas, Casoron may be applied during winter months (November-February) to achieve some degree of control. Do not apply Casoron during the warm months (NOT now) and never apply it to those garden areas where you have herbaceous perennials and bulbs. Casoron, **when used according to labeled instructions**, will provide effective weed control for about a year.

Vegetable Gardens Pointers

Growing potatoes: Avoid planting tubers in cold, wet soils to prevent occurrence of "hollow heart". Avoid over fertilization; excessive watering, watering from above…a problem situation in coastal areas.

Thinning of young plants allows room for healthy growth. Recommended spacing: Two inches for carrots and three inches for beets, onions or parsnips. Each bean plant should have four or five inches of spreading room, and corn from eight to ten inches per stalk. Head lettuce and small size cabbage need about 16 inches, peppers 18 to 20 inches, and tomatoes a minimum of three feet. Cucumbers in rows, or other vine crops in hills, should have about eight inches between plants, or be planted no more than five plants to a hill.

Tomato: Tomato flowers are complete (both male and female organs present) and self-pollinate. Pollen is shed mostly between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. on dry sunny days. Normally, the wind will pollinate the flower sufficiently. To ensure pollination, gently shake the entire tomato plant. Best done at midday when weather is warm and drier.

Optimum fruit set occurs within a very narrow night temperature range of between 60 to 70 degrees F. When tomato plants experience night temperatures lower than 55 degrees or above 75 degrees F., interference with the growth of pollen tubes prevents normal fertilization. The pollen may even become sterile, thus causing the blossoms to drop.

High daytime temperatures, rain, or prolonged humid conditions also hamper good fruit set. If the humidity is too low, the pollen will be too dry and will not adhere to the stigma. If the humidity is too high, the pollen will not shed readily. Pollen grains may then stick together, resulting in poor or non-existent pollination.

Pest Corner is the title of a series of gardening articles which appears in the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties Master Gardener Newsletter.