

News From Your County Agent
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What a way to end Easter weekend with lightning, thunder, rain and even a little hail. As of this Monday morning everything seems to be very wet and thank goodness very little hail damage was reported as of press time. We continue to enjoy a green spring and we hope it will continue for a good while but we all know how things can change very quickly in South Texas. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

Spinach Producers and AgriLife Extension Host Spinach Meeting On Monday

The Winter Garden Spinach Producers and Dr. Kimberly Cochran-Extension Plant Pathologist will host a spinach producers meeting on Monday April 24, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde. The meeting will focus on discussions on spinach diseases encountered during the growing season, update information on spinach disease resistance evaluation trials and other challenges affecting the spinach industry in the Winter Garden. Others on the program will be Del Monte Corporation plant pathologist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Specialist, University of Arkansas Spinach Program and Richard De Los Santos, Director of the Texas Department of Agriculture's office of produce safety. This is a very critical and important meeting where all spinach producers should make plans to attend. For more information about this event contact Marcel Valdez, CEA-ANR/4-H/PL/CoCoord, Texas A&M AgriLIFE Extension Service-Zavala County at (830) 374-2883 or by e-mail: mj-valdez@tamu.edu or Samantha J. Korzekwa, Ag/Natural Resources Extension Agent, Uvalde County at 830.278.6661 or by e-mail at Samantha.korzekwa@ag.tamu.edu.

Sugarcane Aphid Update for South Texas and The Winter Garden

Sugarcane aphid populations continue to increase on sorghum in the Rio Grande Valley. Numerous field in the Lower Rio Grande Valley have been or soon will be sprayed for sugarcane aphid. Sugarcane aphid on sorghum has been documented in Kleberg, Nueces, Jim Wells, San Patricio, Goliad, Refugio, and Fort Bend Counties. It is likely that some fields in all south Texas sorghum are supporting some population of sugarcane aphid. We just have not gotten around to sorghum in all counties to document their presence.

It should be noted that, outside the Lower Rio Grande Valley, sugarcane aphids on sorghum are most common along field edges, especially if volunteer sorghum or Johnson grass is neighboring the field. Their presence on sorghum is the result of local movement from overwintering hosts onto the neighboring sorghum. Their population, thus far, have been spotty and only small colonies (less than 50 aphids) have been observed. However, their presence should be motivation for Zavala County producers to initiate scouting for sugarcane aphid on their sorghum crop. The major source of field-wide sugarcane infestations are coming. Sugarcane aphid populations have been quite high in Mexico and, most recently, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Sorghum in Mexico is maturing and the crop is ahead of normal in the Valley. Numerous winged sugarcane aphids are being reported across the border and in the Valley. Once these aphids become wind-borne they will be moving northward they will be more scattered across fields rather than the border effect we are currently

seeing on sorghum from the Lower Coastal Bend into the Winter Garden area including Zavala County. It is important to remember that the aphid can build in populations to extremely large numbers in a very short period of time. Start scouting sorghum for sugarcane aphid now if you have yet done so.

It is important to recognize labeled insecticide rates are not merely suggestions but the law and important for any implied warranty by the company manufacturing the product. Although rates lower than labeled may be effective, using lower rates may be against the law in some states (not so in Texas). There are several reasons this is not recommended, many of which deal with biological aspects around pesticide and target organism. The major consideration when an off-label application is made, such as using lower than labeled rate, is that it will nullify any implied warranty on the product. If the off-label application fails to work in a satisfactory manner, then the company may not warranty the product in cases of performances failure. Please check with your local chemical representative before making any off-label application to learn of possible consequences of such an application. You may also obtain insecticides approved for sugarcane aphid control at <https://www.texasagriculture.gov/Portals/0/Publications/PEST/Sect18/16TX02%20Transfarm%20WG%20Sec%2018%20Directions.pdf>

Tip of the Week: How To Prevent Ticks and Fleas On Your Yard and Off Your Pets

As I mentioned in the opening of this week's news column we are off to a green and lush spring which is nice but this kind of weather coupled with a very mild winter will no doubt cause many of us to deal with above normal flea and tick problems in our yards and on our pets. Americans spend about \$9 billion a year controlling fleas – one of the biggest expenses for pet owners. In Texas, most flea problems are caused by the Cat flea, This flea feeds on cats, dogs and wildlife. The dog brown tick is also a problem in our area. The best line of defense is to prevent a tick and flea infestation in and around your property. Even if you have not had to deal with a tick and flea problem the potential is there so take steps to prevent it. Remember the way ticks and fleas enter your home is by them hitching a ride on your beloved pet.

Fleas like moisture and shade. Keeping your grass and shrubs cut short allows sunlight to light things up and dry them out. Get rid of any clippings, leaves, and straw lying around outside, too. They can hold moisture.

Ticks like tall grass and yard waste as well as old furniture and trash in the yard where they can hide. Clear it all out. Fleas and ticks may like you and your pets. But they likely rode into your yard on the backs of deer, rodents, wild rabbits, raccoons and other wildlife. Here's how to discourage wildlife from coming into your yard:

- Stack wood neatly in a dry place. This will make rats and mice look for other places to hide.
- Fence your property, so deer and raccoons will look for a yard with an easier way in and out. This will also keep out stray dogs that may not be on flea and tick control.
- Use herbal deer repellents and plantings that deer won't like to eat. These include barberry, bayberry, and perennials like mint, Russian sage, and tarragon.
- Avoid some of these plantings that deer *do* like to eat including hardy geraniums, evergreen azaleas, hostas, and tulips.
- Make sure all garbage is secured and won't be attractive to the likes of possums and raccoons.

- If your yard backs up to woods, you can discourage ticks from visiting your lawn by placing a 3-foot-wide barrier of gravel or wood chips between the grass and the wooded areas.
- If you have [playground](#) toys or lounge chairs on the lawn, keep them away from trees and the edges of your yard.

Ticks like to climb vertical surfaces to rest after feeding. When treating yards for brown dog ticks and fleas, spray the siding of the house, fences, trees and other hiding places as well as the lawn. Microscopic worms called nematodes eat fleas and can be sprinkled in your yard. It's safe to use them around pets and kids. Look for them online or in stores that sell gardening supplies. These natural flea control methods may be enough to manage your problem. If you're not sure if fleas are still out there, here's how to tell. Put on a long pair of white socks and walk through the grass. If the problem is bad, little moving black dots will gather on your sock and you need to take action. You can buy tick and flea products for your yard yourself, but read the labels carefully. You should treat only shady areas -- like under decks and shrubs -- where fleas like to hang out and your pets favorite sleeping areas or dog house. Let it dry thoroughly before allowing your pets or family to go back in the yard. If your situation gets way out of control you might have to hire an exterminator to help you take care of the problem. If so, ask your exterminator about an environmentally safe pesticide. Have a great week. M.V.

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