

News From Your County Agent
By Marcel Valdez, CEA-ANR
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Zavala County

If you enjoy roller coasters then the weather pattern last week was just the trill for you. Warm to cold, to cool to hot and everything in between was the norm for much of the week. As we approach the end of April we should be on a continuous warming trend but you never know what is in store for Texas April weather. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

AgriLife Research and Extension Center To Host Vegetable Field Day

The annual spring vegetable field day will be held at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde on Friday, May 11, 2018 beginning at 7:15 a.m. Marcel Valdez, Zavala County Extension Agent will open the meeting with a brief description of the 2 CEU's that will be offered at this meeting to agricultural producers that hold a Texas Department of Agriculture pesticide applicator license. These individuals will receive one CEU in the IPM category and one in the general category.

The field day will include presentations on harnessing the Nutraceutical Potential of Spinach and watermelons, high tunnel and grafted tomato for organic and conventional systems, Texas A&M short day onion evaluations for southern Texas and several others. The field day will include a field tour with stops to look at Hydroponic leafy greens, Humic Acids in watermelons, olive varieties for Texas, Onion and watermelon varieties, and tomato grafting practice and others. Lunch is provided by First State Bank of Uvalde. If you plan to attend this event you are asked to RSVP by May 4th for the lunch count. RSVP to Liza Silva by e-mail at lmsilva@ag.tamu.edu or by calling 830-279-9151 extension 232.

Zavala County To Participate in Statewide Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus mosquito Surveillance Project

Mosquitoes are the deadliest animals on Earth. Obviously not due to their sheer size, but due to the numerous deadly diseases they are able to carry and transmit. Until recently the only major disease of concern to impact Texas directly has been West Nile Virus but with the inevitable introduction of Zika virus to the continental United States many entomologists in Texas and the Department of State Health Services have joined forces with the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service to look into the population status of the two species of mosquitoes that can transmit Zika. Data from the early 2000's shows both species to be distributed throughout various counties in Texas but more recent data is needed.

To conduct the surveillance to identify population locations for Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus, ovitraps will be distributed to the county agents throughout Texas. The county agents will then place the ovitraps in various locations (5) throughout their county in areas associated with humans. (The targeted mosquitoes are human biting and live with 300 yards of humans). Five locations will be chosen in the county. Five ovitraps (cups) will be placed at each of the five locations, within walking distance from each other but not overlapping. Cups will be placed out on Monday afternoons and picked up on Thursday mornings.

This surveillance project will be conducted from July through October in Zavala County. The traps will be conducted weekly until the correct species are identified or until the season is over, whichever comes first. As soon as the correct species have been identified the county will no longer need to run traps. If you live in an area where mosquitos are a problem and you would like to participate in this project, contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Tip of the Week: Identifying and Controlling Squash Vine Borers

First call Monday morning was from the folks at Zacate ranch just outside of town regarding problems with squash plants. After a little discussion about the problem it was evident from the description of what was going on that squash vine borers was the problem. It's an all too common occurrence. Your squash plants looked fine yesterday. Today they're wilting and no amount of watering has helped. What happened?

While there are any number of insects and diseases waiting to attack and feast on your squash plants, sudden wilting of squash plants is a sure sign of the squash vine borer. The squash vine borer is the larva of a black moth with orange-red markings. It has a wingspan of about 1 - 1 ½ in. (25 to 37 mm). The moth lays its reddish-brown eggs on the squash leaves, often on the underside, where you can't see them. When the eggs hatch, the larva bores its way into the stem, usually in the lower 1 ft. of the stem. That's what causes the plant to wilt. It looks bad, but it does not have to be fatal.

When the larva burrows into the stem of your squash plant, the injury can girdle the stem and prevent the plant from taking up any water or nutrients. This is what causes the plant to wilt, even though you may have recently watered it. If the wound in the stem is not closed, it can ultimately lead to the death of the plant. Multiple borers can often be found in one stem. However, wilting is not the only sign that a squash vine borer has attacked your squash plant. You can often see the small hole and some frass that looks like sawdust around the base or lower stem of the plant, even before the plant begins to wilt.

Controlling and preventing this pest can be done with proper planning. Squash vine borers can move from the vines to the soil, where they will overwinter their larval stage, in cocoons. So your first line of defense should be removing the spent vines immediately after harvesting. This will remove any borers that were lingering in the vines. It is also wise to till the area where they were growing in the garden, to bring any borers that have already made their way into the soil back up to the surface. The birds will take it from there, swooping down and making a feast of the larvae. Planting your squash later in the season can help you to avoid squash vine borer infestations. If you hold off planting until after Memorial Day, the borers will have resurfaced from the soil weeks earlier and, not having found any squash vines to burrow into, will have already moved on in search of a new food supply.

Here are some other tips you can use to control the squash vine borers. In the spring garden, the first mode of defense should be to monitor for eggs. The eggs are small, but since they are a bright orange color, they are fairly easy to spot. If you can remove the eggs when they first appear, you will greatly cut down the population of squash borers in the garden that year and possibly in the future. Be sure to check the underside of leaves.

The larvae usually bore into the stem where it meets the ground. Wrapping some foil around the stem in this area at planting time, before the borers are active, acts as a barrier. They will not bore through the foil. If you do see a vine wilting or notice a hole at the base, it's still possible to save the plant by making a vertical slit into the stem and removing the larvae by hand. The plant will heal. You can cover the wound with moist soil to promote more roots. And finally, you can pile some moist soil over the leaf joints near the in-ground stem. They will root, and the squash plant will continue growing from that section forward. So even if the stem is damaged, the plant won't die. All squash plants can be susceptible to squash vine borers, but some of their favorite hosts include Hubbard squash, all types of zucchini, pumpkins, and gourds. Squash vine borers don't usually attack cucumbers and melons, but if you see the tell-tale sign, take a look at the base of the stems. Controlling this pest in a timely manner should yield you many a fresh squash to enjoy this summer. Have a great week. M.V.

April 25, 2018

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.