

News From Your County Agent
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Zavala County

Greetings to all of you and I hope everyone had a wonderful 4th of July week with friends and family. Hot and dry has been the norm for most of the week but I am not complaining about the temperatures for this time of year. It is bearable and it could be much worse. When it is hot in Alaska and hot in Southwest Texas I can live with that. As we move on through hurricane season we will begin to see more activity in the Atlantic and perhaps our chances of rainfall will start to lean more in our favor.

Required Grower Training Available July 24th

If you have missed a Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) grower training held in our area a few months ago you have a chance to meet this requirement this month. A training for fruit and vegetable growers and others interested in learning about produce safety, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), and co-management of natural resources and food safety may attend. This PSA Grower Training Course is one way to satisfy the FSMA Produce Safety Rule requirement outlined in § 112.22© that requires at least one supervisor or responsible party for your farm must have successfully completed food safety training at least equivalent to that received under standardized curriculum recognized as adequate by the Food and Drug Administration. In addition to learning about produce safety best practices, key parts of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule requirements are outlined within each module. There will be time for questions and discussion, so participants should come prepared to share their experiences and produce safety questions.

This time the training will be sponsored by the Zavala, Uvalde and Medina county Extension agents and will be held on Tuesday July 24, 2019 at the Hondo Public Library located at 2003 Avenue K. in Hondo, TX 78861. The program is scheduled to be held from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. The cost to attend this program is \$40.00 per person which will cover lunch, training materials and certificates. After attending the entire course, participants will be eligible to receive a certificate from the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) that verifies they have completed the training course. To receive an AFDO certificate, a participant must be present for the entire training and submit the appropriate paperwork to their trainer at the end of the course. To register online go to https://secure.touchnet.com/C21490_ustores/web/classic/store_main.jsp?STOREID=401. You may also register by phone by calling 979-862-7678. For additional information about this training or assistance in registering for this event you may call the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Plan To Attend The Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course August 5-7

I have attended this event several times and I can assure you that it is worth your time to go to College Station next month. The Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course has a rich tradition and historical place in the programs emanating from the Department of Animal Science at Texas A&M University. Dating as far back as 1942, Professor John K Riggs started the first in a series of Beef Cattle Short Courses held on the campus of Texas A&M College to discuss the results of beef cattle research from the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station with Texas beef producers. This historical

beginning and purpose is still the standard today for the Beef Cattle Short Course held at Texas A&M University.

Today the highly respected TAM Beef Cattle Short Course is nationally and internationally recognized as the largest attended beef cattle educational program of its type in the world. It has gained the respect from organizations, associations, Land Grant universities and agencies alike as the focal point for beef cattle educational information. The Cattleman's College features more than 20 concurrent sessions. Topics include animal health, nutrition, reproduction, breeding, genetics, selection, research, marketing and handling. Management sessions will cover business, forage, range, and purebred cattle. Topics such as landowner issues and fence building will be featured at this BCSC. Sessions are designed for everyone, from the newest member of the industry to the most seasoned producer. A number of pesticide CEUs, veterinarian CECs and BQA credits are available to attendees. Additionally, over 150 agriculture related businesses and trade show exhibitors annually attend the course and attest to the fact that it is the most highly attended activity of its kind anywhere in the United States. Annually over 1,700 participants attend the Beef Cattle Short Course to gain valuable knowledge about beef cattle production. To register online for this event please go <https://beefcattleshortcourse.com/> and register. For additional information about this training or assistance in registering for this event you may call the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Tip of The Week: Keep Your Squash Plants Producing-By Controlling Bugs

Besides tomato questions there is not a warm growing cycle that does not include a couple of questions regarding squash. This is the time of year that squash should be in full production but as the caller informed me last week this is not happening in your watch. Perhaps this week's tip of the week can help. Squash is a popular warm-season garden vegetable. Squash will grow well in all areas of Texas. Squash plants take up a lot of space, but because they are prolific producers it takes only a few plants to feed a family and all their neighbors.

Squash is one of the plants grown in the traditional Native American vegetable growing technique called the Three Sisters. The other two plants in the Three Sisters are beans and corn. Each plant had its role in this companion planting tradition. Corn served as a structure for the vining beans to grow up. Squash served as a ground cover to prevent weeds from growing. Of course most of us in the Zavala county area don't tangle the tree sisters concept but rather the southwest Texas version of the three sisters-hot peppers, tomatoes and squash. Back to concentrating on squash for the sake of this column.

Let's begin with watering. Water the plants enough to keep them from wilting. If the weather conditions continue as they have been in the past few days by being really dry, then water squash plants at least once a week. Remember if you have sandy soils in your garden then you will need to be watered more often than heavy clay soils. Fertilizers are also important for squash. If your squash plants are still blooming use 2 to 3 tablespoons of fertilizer for each hill. Scatter the fertilizer evenly over a 2-foot by 2-foot area. Work it into the top 3 to 4 inches of soil and water it in.

Of course this being southwest Texas a garden without bugs is like a lake without fish. The most common and detrimental insect affecting squash is squash vine borer. I way to tell if you have this

pest in your squash is to first, look at the leaves of the plant will probably start to wilt even after you have watered properly. Look for holes at the base of the plant and green to orange-yellow sawdust-like “frass” (droppings). Squash vine borers feed on the material inside the stems of the plants which shields the pest from most insecticides making them difficult to control. The stem will start to rot at the site of the feeding first and eventually the plant will die. The only way to control this pest is to prevent this pest from attacking your squash. Sometimes the best solution is to start your squash as early as possible. This way you’ll be harvesting before the summer time when vine borers become active. If you plant early, you may need to be prepared to cover your plants in case of frost. Another tip for preventing the pest is for you to not plant squash in the same bed two years in a row. Squash vine borers overwinter in cocoons in the soil. Also, clean up ALL debris and clean up your soil in the fall. Another good thing to do is as soon as the squash is harvested, get rid of the vines. Till the soil in the fall and spring to get rid of overwintering pupae. Adding parasitic wasps to your garden prior to the egg stage can be helpful as these wasps are the borers’ natural enemy.

If you catch them VERY early, you can manually remove the squash vine borer. Slit the lower stem lengthwise with a fine, sharp knife to remove the larva by hand. One plant can house several larvae. After removal, cover the slit stem section with moist soil above the point of injury to promote formation of secondary roots. Also, extra rich soil near the vines helps re-rooting. Or, if you spot entrance holes and “sawdust,” try inserting a wire and thread through the stem for some distance to kill the inside larvae. Sprinkle diatomaceous earth around the stalks when the squash vines are small. Reapply after rain. Also, build up the soil around the vines. Or, sprinkle black pepper around the plants as a defense. There are insecticides, too, but timing is critical; they are only truly effective when applied at the time that eggs are hatching. The bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is a natural insecticide that can be injected into and applied to the squash stems, however, it is not usually effective because the larvae are protected inside the plant. Many locals find carbaryl (Sevin) to work, too. You may want to use it as well. Squash bugs and cucumber beetles are also common squash pest but these can be controlled effectively with Sevin and other general purpose insecticides. For additional information about this topic you may call the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883 and ask for Extension publication EHT-041 “Easy Gardening-Squash”. Have a wonderful week. M.V.

July 8-12, 2019.