

# *Penny King's* THE GARDEN GATE WARNINGS ON PLANTS AND PESTS: KNOTWEED

Our own Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District has published a flyer on Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*), that noxious plant that is taking over our river and stream banks and lawns and roadsides all over Delaware County. It is an excellent introduction to why the plant is dangerous and should be eradicated as well as some techniques for how to kill it. I have one problem with the information in the flyer: Under the section entitled "The Problem with Knotweed" it says that the plant is shallow rooted. IT ISN'T. It has very deep roots and is nearly impossible to root out. An example: I got some dirt from the County taken from ditches and found Knotweed in it. I asked for it to be taken back out again, but a small piece of Knotweed remained and I am still pulling it out and letting it try on my driveway--that was 18 years ago. I cannot get it out and I have tools most folks don't have such as a long-nosed shovel, a 6' bar and picks and a mattock. No luck. So do not think you can just pull the plant up easily and it will be gone.

Getting rid of it may be a very long process, not necessarily the 5 years stated in the flyer.

I have had one friend who had decided to plant it and nothing I could say would dissuade him. (Bullhead!) You may run into some-body like that so pick up some flyers at the County Fair at the Soil and Water District table and give one to everybody who won't listen to you.

While you are at the table, do me a favor and thank those folks for developing the flyer and see what other informational pamphlets or flyers they might have which you could use. And enjoy the Fair.

## **EMERALD ASH BORER**

This very destructive bug has been seen in Ulster County now, so it will be in Delaware County soon. There is some good news, though. An insecticide and insect antifeedant called *Azadirachta indica*, which is derived from the Neem tree, was injected into some Green Ash trees grown at a dump for those killed by the Ash Borer. The researchers reported that with sufficient amounts of this treatment, no borer larvae made it to maturity and the trees were alive a year later. Much more work needs to be done, but this is the only good news I have heard about this topic. One very nice feature of *Azadirachta* is that it is inexpensive compared to petroleum based pesticides and low risk to other species. We have many Ash trees here and so their survival will be important to both our environment and the harvesting of the wood of this tree. If you see one of these bugs, capture it if you can, put it in a jar and call Cooperative Extension right away.

## **LATE BLIGHT**

Remember last year? Many of us got no tomatoes as they were infected and died before producing a crop. Cherry tomatoes seemed a little less susceptible, but I think I got two tomatoes! Well, it is here

again this year, but seems to be hitting potatoes harder than tomatoes. This disease (*Phytophthora infestans*) is responsible for the Irish potato famine, so is no joke, though we are able to eat other things, unlike those who were forced to eat almost nothing else. Never the less, it is a scary disease that is producing more aggressive strains and spreads by spores especially in cool, moist conditions. Hot dry weather suppresses it but doesn't make it go away. We have had both conditions this weird summer. On tomatoes, it shows as white mold which contains the spores that spread by wind, rain, irrigation, you name it. Pale green, water-soaked spots on leaves will appear, often beginning at the tips. The circular or irregular leaf lesions are often surrounded by a pale yellowish-green border that merges with healthy tissue. These lesions enlarge rapidly and turn dark brown to purplish-black. Potato tubers, late blight appears as a shallow coppery-brown dry rot that spreads irregularly from the surface through the outer layers of tissue. Lesions are brown, dry, sunken on the surface and granular and tan inside the tuber.

If you find late blight in your garden, pullout the entire plant and place it in a plastic bag right away so there will be less spore dispersal. Treat healthy plants with a copper fungicide. There is a fact sheet on-line at <http://ol1ioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/3000/3102.html>.

## **GOOD NEWS ABOUT INSECTICIDES**

Finally, the EPA is researching what kinds of damage the "inert" ingredients in pesticides can do. Up until now, these "inerts" are not even listed on the label so we have never known what they were and some are toxic. Soon that will change. Further, the EPA is testing whether pesticides can disrupt endocrine function in humans and wildlife.

Scientists have been warning for years about the potentially dire consequences of endocrine disruption.

## **PESTS ARE GROWING SMARTER**

According to some research being done in Germany, crop losses due to pests have not significantly decreased during the past decades. And that is with growing use of many pesticides. Pests are adapting! Interestingly, though, losses due to weeds are much higher than those from diseases and pests.

## **GMOS WIN AT SUPREME COURT**

In June of this year the U. S. Supreme Court reversed a lower court ruling preventing the planting of genetically modified alfalfa before the final environmental impact study was completed by the USDA. That means it can be planted without studies done on its impact on surrounding land and plants. We already know that GMO plants are impacting surrounding plants all over our land.

Organic garden organizations are furious and frightened by the implications. No one knows what will happen. But an important clarification in the ruling, written by Justice Samuel Alito, says that part of the environmental impact of bio-engineered crops can be economic losses suffered because of gene contamination of non-bioengineered crops. This opens the door to litigation based on, for example, undesired incorporation of GMO genes in the seeds of organically grown cultivars-making them unsaleable as "organic". At least the lawyers will benefit. I don't know about us.

## **ROUNDUP AND ADHD**

I have been warning folks about using Roundup and any other organophosphate for years. I just read a study that found use of organophosphates correlates with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children. The more of the pesticide is used, the more of a correlation.

## **GOOD NEWS ON THE FOUR-LEAF CLOVER FRONT**

I thought I should end on a positive (sort of) note as the above is pretty depressing. Researchers in Wisconsin (who pays these people?) have discovered the four-leaf clover gene so breeders can now create four-leaf clovers seeds! Whoopie. Good luck for us all.

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