

September 2011

Athens-Clarke County Cooperative Extension

## Shades of Green

From Gardeners, To Gardeners

**Inside this issue:**Corn Smut, It's 2  
What's for Dinner!A Gallling Predic- 3  
amentYour Extension 4  
at WorkFresh from the 4  
Garden RecipeGarden Events 5  
Amanda SaysInquiring Gar- 6  
deners

Classifieds

*What's Buggin' You?* By Pam Snyder

**Red Velvet** is a wonderful three layer cake, commonly covered with cream cheese or buttercream frosting... but Red Velvet is also found on the thorax and abdomen of the largest velvet ant species, *Dasymutilla occidentalis*.

These “ants” are actually wasps, not ants and can reach about an inch in length. The females are wingless and covered with the orange-red hair and have a body shape that makes them resemble giant ants. Males are similar in appearance but have wings and cannot sting.



The females are usually seen running around on the ground during the hot summer months. They prefer sandy soil and are searching for ground bee nests, most likely, a cicada-killer wasp nest.



Digging into a bee's nesting chambers, the female will chew a hole through the bee's cocoon, deposit an egg on the host larva which will hatch and feed on the host larva. The adults feed on water and flower nectar.

Sometimes referred to as “cow killer,” the sting from the female red velvet ant is said to be so painful that it could “kill a cow.”

## *Corn Smut: It's What's for Dinner* By Helen Wenner

**“Huitlacoche”** (weet-lah-koh-chey), “Mexican Truffles” or “Corn Smut”—call it what you will. In some parts of the world, when properly prepared and cooked, it’s a delicacy. So I hear. I figure any Master Gardener worth his or her salt can plant sweet corn and produce a decent harvest. However, it takes special skill (or in my case, more bad luck) to produce multiple ears of corn inoculated with corn smut (*Ustilago maydis*), and I wasn’t even trying!

The first week’s corn harvest was completely normal. My husband and I watched the ears plump out and angle away from the stalk. We enjoyed our Silver Queen corn and didn’t object to sharing some of the topmost kernels with the occasional corn earworm nestled inside.

Imagine our dismay, no make that disgust, when some of the remaining ripening ears burst open their husks to reveal kernels swollen triple their normal size and grey, like a mouthful of rotten molars!



It didn’t take much detective work to figure out that we had corn smut on our hands. Nothing else looks quite like it, thank goodness.

It was a relief to learn that good garden management in the future would lessen the chances of its reoccurrence next year. Since the fungus that causes corn smut is airborne, often overwintering in the dried out corn stalks, I will remove the old stalks promptly this year. Actually, my horses love the stalk silage so it’s a win-win for our little farm.

I also pledge to practice crop rotation, provided of course I

remember next spring what I planted where this year. Ah yes, planting charts into the file...

Now as for corn smut recipes, you’re on your own there, but I understand you can actually buy it on the internet or at a specialty store pre-packaged and ready to use. Go for it! It could be what’s for dinner--at your house.

More information on corn smut including cultural controls and resistant varieties click on this link below:

<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/450/450-706/450-706.html>

## *A Galling Predicament* By Helen Wenner

Doesn't everyone with a little acreage and a lot of sunshine dream of a home orchard? When the grandchildren come over, you can take them out back and watch their delight as they pluck large ripe apples from the fruit laden trees. Their eyes light up as they savor the sweetness and the juices dribble down their chin. If you have a home orchard like that, then I want to be one of your grandchildren.

My home apple orchard looks a bit different. Actually, lot different. Each spring all of our trees bloomed prettily and started setting fruit when all of a sudden their leaves would get little yellow dots on them. Then more yellow dots would appear, the leaves would eventually turn yellow, and pretty soon most of them



were curled, shriveled, and gone.

Did I neglect to say that our farm abounds with tall old red cedar trees? Too late we learned that apple trees and red cedars cannot happily co-exist thanks to the dreaded cedar-apple rust.

Actually, cedar-apple rust (*Gymnosporangium juniper-virginianae*) is an interesting and complex fungus in that it requires two very different host species to complete its life cycle. You might notice some hard galls forming on the cedar trees over the winter. Come spring rains, these plump up and transform into squishy orange balls with little horns sticking out all over—something like a soft version of a sea urchin. Spores are released out of these telial horn, and if conditions are right and a non-resistant apple variety is down wind, the rust will settle into the young leaves and begin to grow. By summer's end the apple tree part of the rust life cycle is complete and the aeciospores are released and carried to the

wind to a waiting red cedar. Life goes on ...



So what's a gardener to do? You can (1) abandon all hope for an apple orchard, (2) cut down every red cedar (3) inspect any cedar trees you have in the fall and winter to remove all galls, (4) spray the apple trees weekly beginning early spring with an appropriate fungicide, or (5) plant rust resistant varieties of apple trees (NOT golden delicious like we did; apparently McIntosh and many Red Delicious trees are very resistant and be sure to plant different varieties for cross pollination). I suppose a final option would be to do nothing, in which case you'll be able to take stunning photos of your cedars sporting unusual orange "flower" ornaments in the spring. Just don't plan on making much (if any) applesauce come fall!

## *Your Extension at Work*

A rain barrel construction workshop was hosted by Thyme After Thyme on Friday, July 29 from 4p.m. to 6p.m. The workshop was presented by Ellison Fidler from Athens-Clarke County Stormwater, Marilyn Hall from the Water Conservation Office and Amanda Tedrow, Sam Ingram and Pam Snyder from the Athens-Clarke County Cooperative Extension. Master Gardener Frank Johnson, who coordinates

construction of rain barrels for the Athens Area Master Gardener Association, used his expertise in assisting homeowners to convert approximately nine plastic barrels and one large plastic trash bin to rain barrels. Two

AAMGA rain barrels were also sold during this event.

At workshops such as this, the first barrel conversion is free and each additional conversion is only \$10.00 with a limit of 4 per person.

For future rain barrel workshops, check the calendar of events at the Athens-Clarke County website.



## *Fresh From the Garden Recipe, By John Aitkens*



If your kitchen window is like mine at this time of the season, it's lined with ripening tomatoes. I don't do canning and can eat only so many BLTs, but I've found a way to put them to good use -- homemade salsa. I also grow sweet banana peppers and put them along with the tomatoes in a food processor. I then throw in some jalapeno peppers (which I intend to plant next year), crushed garlic (which I could plant this fall), salt, pep-

per, and cilantro if I've got some. These added ingredients, quantities and ratios are all to your own taste. It's a nice, low-calorie salsa to go with my, high-calorie tortilla chips! Enjoy!



## *Gardening Events in Our Area*



September at The State Botanical Garden of Georgia:

**Seed Saving** presented by Amanda Tedrow, Thursday, September 8 from 9-10 a.m., members \$14, non-member \$16.

**Beneficial Insects** presented by Amanda Tedrow, Tuesday, September 20 from 9-11 a.m., members \$14, non-members \$16.

Elsewhere:

**Athens Water Festival** at Sandy Creek Park on Saturday, September 10, from 10am-2 pm. Park entry fee is \$2 per person ages 4-64; activities at the festival are free.

**Horticulture Farm Open House and Field Day** on Friday, September 23. Located at 1221 Hog Mountain Rd., Watkinsville. Event cost is \$20, includes lunch.

Contact our office for registration or additional info, (706) 613-3640

### *Amanda Says*



It has been an interesting month around the Extension office. We are not receiving as many calls as usual but I think that can be attributed to the extreme weather we have been experiencing. I know of many gardeners who have given up on their thirsty summer tomatoes and are fondly thinking of cool season veggies. In fact, if you are starting plants from seed you can go ahead and put them in the ground or start them indoors. Start your carrot and beet seeds in the garden now and if you have transplants of leafy greens such as cabbage, collards, kale and lettuce they can go in as well. If you are concerned

about our current warm and dry temperatures you can hold off on planting for another couple of weeks.

Other gardeners prefer to let their garden rest over the winter. If this is more your style, make sure to remove plant debris and clean your tools before leaving it until next spring. Another option is the use of a cover crop over the winter. Some gardeners use vetch, rye or crimson clover as a cover crop to help the soil and reduce the weed pressure.

For more information on when to plant which vegetables here is a planting chart:

<http://www.caes.uga.edu/applications/publications/files/html/B577/B577PlantingChart.pdf>

## Inquiring Gardeners

**Q** How is sulfur used in the vegetable garden?

**A** Yellow powder sulfur is used to lower the pH (which is an increase in acidity) in soil. Soil dwelling bacteria need time to break down the sulfur so it is slow acting but long lasting. Because this process is the result of microbial activity, it may take a

few months or longer to change the soil pH to the desired level. It is therefore best applied in spring or summer and take a new soil sample in the fall before planting to check the pH level again. Georgia's soils tend to be acidic naturally so be sure to make this amendment only according to a soil

test recommendation.

Sulfur as a plant nutrient is added in the form of sulfate. Calcium sulfate (gypsum) and magnesium sulfate (Epsom salt) are two common forms that are readily available sources of sulfur for plants.

## Classified Ads



**Free Water Lilies** are still available, 8 varieties; you do the digging. Call Don Sellers at 706-540-0664

**Ten white rain barrels** for sale, \$20.00 each. Delivery available to the Athens area. Call Beth Carter at 706-357-0404

**A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows.**

Please call Pam Snyder at 706-613-3640 or send an email to: [clarkepa@uga.edu](mailto:clarkepa@uga.edu) if you would like to place an ad.

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for Life**

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Cooperative Extension's mission is to respond to the people's needs and interest in Agriculture, the Environment, Families and 4-H/Youth in Athens-Clarke County with unbiased, researched-based education and infor-