

# The Grower's Spade

Horticulture tools for your farm and garden



Yadkin County Center

April - June 2020

## The IPM Issue

IPM = integrated pest management; combining cultural practices, physical barriers, and natural predators with chemicals to control pests

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### What does a mild winter mean for insect pests?

COVID-19 has brought normal life to a standstill. Meanwhile nature steadfastly follows her course. The soil warms, daylight hours lengthen, buds break, and INSECTS emerge from their winter lairs.



#### 2019 weather patterns

Climate data shows that North Carolina's 2019 average temperature was the highest on record, 2.7 degrees F above the average temperature from 1901-2000 (NOAA). Winter weather followed a consistently warm and wet trend. In the Piedmont, we saw several January days in the 70s, but even more prominent was the lack of below-freezing nights. Unseasonable warm February weather rounded off the winter and sent plants into bloom weeks earlier than normal.

#### Winter impacts some insects

**Q. Does a warm winter mean more insects? A. It depends.** Winter temps effect different insects differently. A warm winter has little effect on insects that diapause (or hibernate) and have one generation. They have a predefined rest period regardless of temperature. For insects that don't diapause and have multiple generations per year, a mild winter means better survival and earlier reproduction. As a general rule, these insects are active earlier and may be an issue following mild winters. That said, insect populations are also determined by factors like a wet spring and heat.

#### Probable pests (or not)

What are pests to watch for after the mild 2019-20 winter?



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- Tomato hornworms and Japanese beetles are NOT likely to be any worse this year.
- Be extra vigilant for thrips, green peach aphids, and spider mites in vegetables.
- Spotted wing drosophila (SWD) infestations of berries more likely.

SWD (*drosophila suzukii*) is an invasive fruit fly that lays eggs in fleshy fruits; blackberry and blueberry are frequent victims. Larvae hatch and feed inside fruit making it inedible (and unsellable). The first step in managing SWD is to monitor fields for adults using traps and sample fruit for larvae. Trap instructions - [site.caes.uga.edu/blueberry/swd/](http://site.caes.uga.edu/blueberry/swd/). Harvest frequently and remove fallen fruit. Consult your local extension agent for chemical recommendations if larvae are found in fruit.

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Photo by Katja Schulz

## Pest of the Season

*Flea beetle: an early season garden menace*

This group of tiny pests is one of the first to plague vegetable gardens. Flea beetles are shiny, oval-shaped, 1/10" long beetles with a powerful jumping ability. When disturbed they hop like hot grease off a leaf. Several species are plant pests, each with a taste for its preferred crop. The crucifer flea beetle (*phyllotera crucifera*) effects members of the brassica family, especially mustards, turnips, and radish. Other species attack plants in the nightshade family; eggplant is most susceptible.

Flea beetles inflict damage to fall brassicas and spring plantings that far exceed their tiny size. Adults are voracious feeders leaving small, round marks with a silvery sheen. This seriously reduces the quality of vegetables grown for leaves. If unchecked, flea beetles can "skeletonize" leaves and defoliate entire plants. Damage is most severe early in the season when adults emerge from overwintering. Small seedlings may be stunted and experience yield loss from early season damage.



Photo by James Lindsey

**Watch for** flea beetles this year as populations are higher after a mild winter.

Manage flea beetles with a

combination of physical barriers and cultural practices. Transplant larger, instead of smaller seedlings, into the garden. Plant into black plastic mulch or landscape fabric to speed up establishment. Supply enough water and fertilizer to maintain robust seedlings. Protect susceptible crops with physical barriers like row covers and insect netting. Protectants such as Kaolin clay (surround) can deter flea beetles. Rotate crops regularly and remove weedy hosts such as pigweed, lamb's quarter, and wild mustard for long-term control. *Contributing author: Eli Snyder, Wilkes County Extension*

# Hort Happenings

**April** – events canceled due to COVID-19

**May** (subject to change or cancellation)

**4** **Growin' & cookin' spring veggies**

Yadkinville United Methodist Church  
5:30 pm potluck; 6:30 pm class

**5** **Yadkin Farmers Market Opens**

1141 Tennessee Street, Yadkinville  
Tuesday 3-6 pm; Saturday 9 am -1 pm

**8** **Mother's Day Plant Sale**

Yadkinville UMC, 11am -6 pm

**June**

**1** **Beneficial insects**

Yadkinville United Methodist Church  
5:30 pm potluck; 6:30 pm class

**16** **Ask a Master Gardener**

Yadkin Farmers Market, 3-6 pm

## Plant Spotlight

*False Indigo*



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Butterflies, bees and hummingbirds flock to the early, deep blue flare of false indigo (*baptisia australis*). The 4-ft tall, bushy perennial pairs nicely with summer bloomers. It does well in full sun to part shade, moist soil, and planted against a support like a fence row.

### Growing tips

False indigo grows underground for its first 2-3 years. The patient gardener is rewarded with showier blooms and foliage each following season. Wide spacing is advisable. Plant from fresh seed collected and sown in mid-summer (pro-tip: scope out baptisia in bloom and ask for seed). Plant division is not recommended as established plants do not like to be disturbed.