Have you seen this?

Invasive Japanese Stiltgrass

Whether this invasive grass is taking over lawn, shrub and flower beds or wooded areas, now is the time to stop stiltgrass from dropping seeds that germinate for years to come. This annual grass produces seed from late August through September. Small easy-to-pull tufts, with almost no root, have now shot up as high as 3 feet, rooting from many nodules. Tall plants can be cut low with string trimmers or mowers. The remaining plant will not have time to make seeds. Provided seeds are not mature, plants need not be bagged. In mowed lawns, stiltgrass produces seed too low to mow off. (Bag up clippings with seeds.) In small lawns, hand pull. A crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide, applied early next spring, helps prevent future germination. Search ‘stiltgrass’ on the HGIC website.

---More on stiltgrass

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Food Preservation - the season to learn how to preserve your crops is upon us.

Lawn renovation - late summer into early fall is the time for lawn projects or consider lawn alternatives for problem areas.

Saddleback caterpillars - look but do not touch!
Milkweeds are under assault from an alien insect, the oleander aphid, *Aphis nerii*. These little orange insects suck the sap out of stems, leaves, can cause flowers and pods to abort, and can even kill plants. They concentrate milkweed toxins in their tissue more effectively than native milkweed aphids, and studies have shown that beneficial insects are less effective at controlling them. As a milkweed gardener, what are your options?

- **Wait for beneficial insects to arrive** - sometimes this approach works and sometimes it is an abysmal failure.

- **Right plant right place** - reduce stress on your milkweeds and they are less likely to be plagued by aphids. Swamp milkweeds require constant moisture, butterfly milkweeds require excellent drainage.

- **Don’t fertilize milkweeds** - in general, aphids are attracted to plants with higher nitrogen content.

When patience and prevention have been exhausted, it’s time to get out the big guns. The following options will kill aphids, but will also take some beneficial insects and even monarch caterpillars out, so use the utmost caution:

- **Squish** - place affected parts of the milkweed plant between thumb and forefinger and drag along the stem.

- **Squirt** - use water from a hose or strong spray bottle to blast the aphids off the stem (can be combined with previous option).

- **Spray** - spray aphid colonies with either horticultural soap or oil, both break down quickly but the soap is more likely to burn foliage. To prevent damage to insects elsewhere on the plant, consider cupping the part of the plant you are spraying in the palm of your hand.

In most cases, it will be necessary to repeat these treatments one week and even two weeks later.
Don't forget you can pick tomatoes ahead of full ripeness!

There's a persistently repeated myth out there that you need to let tomatoes ripen on the vine or they won't have "fresh-picked flavor." But really, this isn't true. A tomato picked early and ripened on your counter will be just as good as one left on the plant.

Pick your tomatoes at "breaker" stage, when they've just started turning color. Hard green tomatoes will not ripen to satisfaction indoors, but tomatoes that are beginning to soften and blush red (or yellow, or purple, or whatever the ripe color will be) will do just fine.

So remember, if your vine-ripened tomatoes get savaged by birds and squirrels - pick early. If your lovely soft red fruits end up with hard spots from stink bug damage - pick early. If your plants are losing leaves fast to fungal diseases, and you're worried the fruits will get sunburned or rot - pick early. If you don't get to your garden every day to pick, and tomatoes often over-ripen and fall off - pick early. If your fruits tend to crack after rain - pick early.

We've been saying this since 2011! Read Bob's post about tasting kitchen-ripened tomatoes. This is the best advice I've had about tomatoes ever. It doesn't always work, and you will still lose a few of your
precious fruits to really greedy visitors or rots that set in early, but your yields will be far higher and your frustration levels much lower.

By Erica Smith

--> More from the Grow It Eat It blog

Q&A

Our lawn has developed large dead areas again this year. It seems to happen every year; we start out great in the spring but by September it looks terrible. Is it a fungus? Any help would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

A Tall fescue is the species of grass that should be grown in Maryland. This is a cool season grass, meaning it grows best in cool, moist conditions in the spring and fall. During the hot, dry part of the summer, tall fescue will go dormant. But, it has the ability to green up quickly as soon as rainfall returns because the roots are still healthy. Reseeding can be necessary following summer stressors. Tall fescue is prone to brown patch but with proper care turf can recover. Begin lawn renovation projects with a soil test. Look for the soil test icon on our homepage along with information on lawn renovation found under ‘Lawns’.

--> More info on Lawns

Have a plant or pest question? University of Maryland Extension’s experts have answers! Send in your questions and photos here.

Have a suggestion for a topic to cover in the HGIC newsletter? Send in your suggestions.

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