Kelly Feehan
Extension Educator – Community Environment
2715 13th Street, Columbus, NE 68601
402-563-4901
environment.unl.edu
water.unl.edu/stormwater
platte.unl.edu
Twitter: @KellyFeehan2

21 November 8 PSAs

Houseplants summered outdoors and now brought indoors need to be inspected and monitored for hitch-hikers. Hopefully plants were given a thorough inspection and bath before returning indoors. But insects are good at hiding and monitoring needs to continue. One thing that may have been overlooked is the potting mix. Slide the plant out of the container and check the mix for insects, especially at the containers bottom. Ants may have also spent the summer digging out the potting medium and carrying it away; or sowbugs and pill bugs may have fed on organic matter. Scrape off some of the old soil and use new soil to repot the plant. If roots are crowded, move the plant into a slightly larger container. If the plant had been sunk into soil while outdoors, look for and remove earthworms. Earthworms are beneficial outdoors, but when confined to a pot, they may damage roots as they move around in the restricted soil area.

I was recently asked if, while building a berm, would the addition of one foot of soil over the roots of an established tree harm the tree. The answer is yes. Changes in soil depth around trees can cause injury to root systems that will lead to a slow, or sometimes fast, decline in the tree. The addition of only 4 to 6 inches of soil over an existing root system drastically reduces the amount of oxygen and water available to roots. Keep in mind tree roots grow in the upper 6 to 24 inches of soil and can extend outward up to two times the trees height. Any change in soil depth, or trenching, nearby can have a detrimental effect on the tree. This is also why we recommend mulch layers only be two to three inches deep. In the case of building a berm, homeowners need to decide if they still want it in that location; and if so be prepared for the tree it is built around to decline; or move the berm or decide not to use one to conserve the tree.

As trees drop leaves, hard, black, bumpy growths on branches of plum trees become easier to see. Finding them may prompt homeowners to remove them; however, removal of infected branches is best done in late winter or early spring. These growths are caused by black knot fungal disease that causes hard, black, elongated galls on branches and twigs. It affects plum, cherry and occasionally other related plants. Pruning is the most important control measure and can reduce infection by 80 percent. Knots should be removed in late winter or early spring before growth begins, with branches pruned at least 2 to 4 inches below each knot. Sterilize pruning tools between cuts. Fungicides offer protection against black knot, but will not be effective if pruning and sanitation are ignored. Fungicides provide the greatest benefit if applied before rainy periods in spring, when temperatures are greater than 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

Store pesticides correctly and securely. Storage information for each pesticide can be found on the pesticide label. Read and follow it for safety. Correct storage can also help keep pesticides from degrading so they may no longer be as effective. This might happen if they're stored at the wrong temperature for example. In general, pesticides need to be stored in a secure, well ventilated location that can be locked. The location should be away from children, pets, and food items as well as anything that might be contaminated in case of a leak or accidental spill. Do not store pesticides near heat, sparks, or open flames; and check that containers are tightly closed. Always store pesticides in their original containers. A mistake made is pouring a pesticide into a container other than the original. This is against pesticide label law and it has led to accidental poisonings or damage to non-target plants.

A question about winter storage of pesticides is if the pesticide is still effective after it freezes. Most pesticides are safely stored between 40 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit, but check the label for storage temperature requirements and any warnings against freezing. If a liquid pesticide freezes, it might be less effective in controlling pests. Pesticides contain active and inactive ingredients. The active ingredient is what kills the pest. Inactive ingredients include solvents, carriers, or emulsifiers that make the pesticide more efficient. Due to some inactive ingredients, the freezing point of some liquid pesticides could be lower than 32 degree F. Pesticides formulated as wettable powders or granules are not affected by low temperatures. Products in water-soluble packets should not freeze as they tend to become brittle and break open. Read the label for temperature storage requirements and what to do if a pesticide does freeze.

MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS
By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator
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It's time to think about becoming an Extension Master Gardener. If you enjoy spending time in the garden and landscape, learning new things, meeting people who also enjoy plants, and being involved in your community, consider becoming a Master Gardener.

Don't let the word Master Gardener deter you. The program is open to beginning and expert gardeners. While volunteers tend to have some experience and knowledge, this is not a requirement and should not stop you from exploring the program.

Master gardeners are volunteers of each states land grant University. In Nebraska, it is the University of Nebraska at Lincoln where the program started 1976.

Our mission is to extend the outreach of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Volunteers help provide unbiased, science based horticulture information and volunteer in landscape and garden activities to enhance community green space.

Education and learning are key components of becoming a Master Gardener. Over one to two years, new volunteers attend 40 hours of local and virtual education and volunteer an equal number of hours.

Once the first 40 hours of training and volunteer time is completed, returning volunteers are asked to attend a minimum of 12 education hours and volunteer 20 hours to the program each year. In surveys of volunteers, it is the lifelong learning they most enjoy.

For training, topics range from plant identification to tree, fruit, vegetable, perennial flower and lawn care as well as pest identification and management. There may be classes on improving soil, attracting pollinators and learning how to prune or propagate plants. Topics vary each year.

Along with increasing plant knowledge, benefits include meeting people who have similar interests, sharing plants, discussing gardening successes and failures, and learning from one another.

Volunteer opportunities include sharing gardening knowledge with others, community and demonstration garden care, harvesting and donating fresh produce to local food pantries, citizen science projects, 4-H/youth garden and outdoor education, and more. Volunteers can create their own projects.

Across Nebraska, there are over 600 volunteers. Volunteers do not need to live in the county where their training takes place. They can be trained in one county and volunteer their time in the county they live in as needed.

In our general area, training programs take place in Columbus, Norfolk, Grand Island, Fremont, Sioux City and York. In Columbus, Master Gardener classes are held on Thursday mornings and Monday or Tuesday evenings in February and March.

There is a one-time fee to join the Extension Master Gardener program. While it varies some, it is usually around $150. This fee covers training, a handbook, T-shirt and name tag. After the first year, there is a state fee of $10 paid per year.

If you are interested in learning more about the Extension Master Gardener program in Nebraska, call me at 563-4901 or e-mail kfeehan2@unl.edu. Information can also be found at https://mastergardener.unl.edu if you prefer to explore the website first.