GROWING TROPICAL AND HARDY HIBISCUS

There are many beautiful tropical and hardy hibiscus available through nurseries and garden centers. I grow three varieties of hardy hibiscus and one tropical. Throughout the year I receive calls from homeowners regarding hibiscus. The first thing to know is the difference between the hardy and the tropical. Know what you are purchasing, so when you call me with questions I can better answer your questions. Tropical and hardy hibiscus do not have the same requirements.

The hibiscus is a member of the mallow family which encompasses nearly 300 species including trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals. *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* is the species most commonly available through nurseries, garden centers and florists. These are bred specifically for flower size and color. They make great house plants and are a wonderful addition to a summer garden.

*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* is not winter hardy, and therefore must be brought in before the first fall frost. The beautiful, exotic-looking flowers are short-lived, typically blooming for only one day.

Tropical hibiscus likes a rich, well-drained soil mixture. A good potting mix could contain two parts potting soil, two parts peat moss and one part perlite or vermiculite. Tropical hibiscus does not tolerate cold temperatures. It needs warm temperatures for flower buds to develop. Indoors, tropical hibiscus should be grown in a warm, sunny location where daytime temperatures are no lower than 55°F; 65° to 75°F is best for optimum growth. They require very bright light to bloom well indoors. A sunny western or southern exposure that has at least 4-5 hours of bright, direct light is best. The more light they have, the better they’ll bloom, indoors or out. Keep the soil relatively moist, not saturated. Never allow the soil to dry out to the point of wilting. Fertilize plants with a balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20 or 10-10-10.

After the danger of frost, place a tropical hibiscus outdoors, but before placing them directly in full sun, it is important to acclimate them to the brighter conditions. Begin by moving the hibiscus to a porch, then to filtered light under a shade tree and finally into the bright sunlight. Reverse the process in the fall so that the plant is indoors before the first frost. By easing the plant into the different conditions, one can prevent bud loss and minimize foliage loss.

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Sometimes hibiscus drop leaves and buds. Abrupt changes in soil moisture, air temperature or drafts can cause yellowing of the leaves. Avoid excessive watering. Some yellowing is normal in spring or fall when growing conditions are in transition. Yellowing may signal need for fertilizer. If buds drop, this can be an indication that it is too hot or too cold. Hibiscus need daytime temperatures between 65°F-75°F to develop buds. Avoid drafty areas and low light conditions. The leaves on my tropical hibiscus turn yellow and drop every winter after bringing it indoors. I've realized this is fairly normal because it is a shock to the plant to go from outdoor conditions to the warm, dry conditions in a home. In the spring I place it outside and it forms new buds, leaves out and produces beautiful blooms by mid to late summer.

The most common insects on hibiscus are aphids and spider mites. Keep the foliage clean by washing it periodically. Use insecticidal soap or insecticides labeled for use on hibiscus if necessary.

Hardy hibiscus shrubs supply the garden with all the beauty of a tropical hibiscus, but they can withstand cold winter temperatures that kill the tropical types. Most hardy hibiscuses thrive in hardiness zones 4 through 9 with minimal winter protection. The best planting site provides a soil base rich in humus and organic matter that drains well but doesn't dry completely. Amending the planting area with compost prior to planting improves the soil quality and encourages proper drainage. Hardy hibiscus require plenty of sunlight to bloom well. Plant hardy hibiscus in full sun. Hibiscus plants don't require heavy pruning to maintain a formal shape, but some pruning helps improve plant health and can result in better flowering. Remove winter-damaged and dead stems in late winter or early spring. In frost prone areas the stems usually die back to the ground but the roots survive and the hibiscus quickly grows new stems in spring. Mulch around plants to hold in moisture and to provide protection and insulation for the hibiscus roots. I’ve grown hardy hibiscus for eight years and find them very easy to grow. I apply 12-12-12 fertilizer in early spring, prune out the dead stems, then watch them grow and produce beautiful blooms in various colors.

BROWN MARMORATED STINK BUG FOUND IN MISSOURI

Farmers and homeowners in Missouri should be on the lookout for the brown marmored stink bug this year. The invasive insect has been found in southwestern Missouri, Jefferson City and St. Louis, according to reports from University of Missouri Extension specialists. Missouri becomes the 42nd state where the bug has been spotted. Native to Asia, it first appeared in the U.S. in the 1990s.

Large populations of the bug invaded western Illinois in 2013. The bug overwinters in extreme cold by making its own antifreeze. It also survives winter by staying in buildings. In late May and early June, the bug begins feeding on corn, soybean, fruits and vegetables. There are no known natural predators. It produces a foul odor when disturbed, thus earning the name “stink bug.” The smell is difficult to remove from buildings.

Larger than other stink bugs, it is about a half inch long. It has white stripes on its antennae and faint white bands on its legs and the outer edges of its abdomen. Its piercing mouthparts damage green plants. Stink bugs usually emerge from wooded areas and attack outside rows of crops. Two to three weeks after early-season feeding, plants damaged by the bugs take on a twisted appearance. The bugs can be deadly to plants.

Patrick Byers, MU Extension horticulture specialist in southwestern Missouri, said a Greene County Master Gardener spotted the first bug in the Ozarks. MU Extension specialists and a representative of the Missouri Department of Agriculture confirmed the identification. Jacob Wilson, Lincoln University integrated pest management associate, said stink bugs have been found at LU’s Busby Farm. Pest management specialists there have pheromone-monitoring traps in place.

If you find brown marmored stink bugs in your area, you can help with monitoring efforts by reporting your sighting at https://njaes.rutgers.edu/stinkbug/report.asp. For more information about the brown marmored stink bug, go to http://www.stopbmsb.org.

Source: Patrick Byers, 417-881-8909; Writer-Linda Geist, University of Missouri Extension.
CONCERNS ABOUT EMERALD ASH BORER

In the past two years, I have received many calls from homeowners whom are concerned about Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). Emerald Ash Borer has not yet been confirmed in any northeast Missouri counties.

EAB was first identified in southeast Michigan in 2002. It most likely traveled in ash wood used for stabilizing cargo in ships or for packing consumer products. Emerald ash borer (Agrilus planipennis) is an exotic, invasive, wood-boring insect that infests and kills native North American ash trees, both in forests and landscape plantings. Just like the Dutch elm disease that killed our native American elm trees, emerald ash borer (EAB) is capable of eliminating all ash trees from our forests and cities. This makes it one of the most serious environmental threats now facing North American forests.

It is expected that EAB will diminish ash trees in Missouri's forests to a very low level. Although ash trees account for just three percent of Missouri's native forest, the fast-growing shade tree is popular for landscaping. On average, about 14 percent of trees lining streets in urban settings are ash. In some neighborhoods and parks, the figure reaches as high as 30 or 40 percent. Once EAB has infested an area, standing dead trees will be a serious threat to public safety and the cost of removing dead trees will be very high for both homeowners and communities alike.

The adult beetle is dark metallic green, bullet-shaped and about 1/2 inch long and 1/8 inch wide. The body is narrow and elongated, and the head is flat with black eyes. EAB larvae are white and flat, have distinctive bell shaped segments and can grow up to 1 1/4 inches long. There are many other green insects that look similar to the adult EAB. Adult females lay their eggs on the bark of ash trees. When the eggs hatch, the larvae burrow under the bark and eat the living tissue, cutting off the life-giving channels that carry nutrients, like water and sugars, to the tree. After 2 to 4 years, enough of the channels are cut off that the tree starves to death.

All ash species found naturally in Missouri, green, white, pumpkin and blue ash, as well as horticultural cultivars (e.g. Autumn Purple white ash or Marshall Seedless green ash) have been killed by EAB, which can infest trees ranging in size from saplings to fully mature trees. While most native borers kill only severely weakened trees, EAB can also kill healthy trees, making it especially devastating.

As of December 2012, EAB had been found in 18 states, including Missouri, and in two Canadian Provinces. EAB was first discovered near Wappapello Lake in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Greenville Recreation Area in Wayne County, Missouri in July of 2008. As of December 2012, EAB has been found in Reynolds, Madison and Platte counties.

State, federal, local agencies and groups are working together to educate the public and slow the spread of EAB. Alerting the public to the risk of moving firewood and spreading EAB is key to prevention. This is a slow moving insect, except when people allow it to hitchhike on firewood.

Annual surveys to detect the arrival of EAB are conducted by the Missouri Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture at selected sites throughout the state which may include state parks, public and commercial campgrounds, nurseries and high-risk urban sites. These efforts include visual surveys as well as purple prism shaped traps and detection trees. The agencies, as well as the Missouri Department of Conservation, also rely on reports from concerned citizens of possible EAB infestations.

Dying Ash trees are not always an indication of EAB. Ash trees are affected by several diseases and insects. Ash trees throughout the state may exhibit dying branches and/or decline and some may show signs of heavy woodpecker dam-age. This may or may not be due to EAB. Signs to look for are 1/8 inch diameter D-shaped holes in the bark where the beetles have exited and short (3-5 inches) vertical splits in the bark that reveal S-shaped “trails” (tunnels) under the bark. If you discover EAB your trees, please call (866) 716-9974. You can help stop the spread of EAB by not spreading the pests. Burn firewood where you get it. Avoid planting ash trees. Instead, choose other large shade trees for landscaping. Stay vigilant and be on the lookout for potential EAB infestations.

For more information see www.eab.missouri.edu.

Source: http://extension.missouri.edu/treepests/emeraldashborer.aspx
GARDEN TIPS FOR JUNE

ORNAMENTALS
- Watch for bagworms feeding on many garden plants, especially juniper and arborvitae.
- Deadhead bulbs and spring flowering perennials as blossoms fade.
- Thin seedlings to proper spacing before plants crowd each other.
- Apply organic mulches as the soil warms. These will conserve moisture, discourage weeds, and enrich the soil as they decay.
- Most houseplants brought outside prefer a bright spot shaded from afternoon sun. Check soil moisture daily during hot weather.
- Rhizomatous begonias are not just for shade. Many varieties, especially those with bronze foliage do well in full sun if given plenty of water and a well-drained site.
- Apply a balanced rose fertilizer after the first show of blooms is past.
- When night temperatures stay above 50 degrees, bring houseplants outdoors for the summer.
- Apply a second spray for borer control on hardwood trees. Trees and shrubs may still be fertilized before July 4th.
- Pruning of spring flowering trees and shrubs should be done after flowering.
- Continue spraying roses with a fungicide to prevent black spot disease.

VEGETABLES
- Repeat plantings of corn and beans to extend the harvest season.
- As soon as cucumber and squash vines start to “run,” begin spray treatments to control cucumber beetles and squash vine borers.
- Plant pumpkins now to have Jack-O-Lanterns for Halloween.
- Early detection is essential for good control of vegetable pests. Learn to identify and distinguish between pests and beneficial predators.
- Stop harvesting asparagus when the spears become thin.
- Start seedlings of broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower. These will provide transplants for the fall garden.
- Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems make the most efficient use of water during dry times.
- To minimize diseases, water with overhead irrigation early enough in the day to allow the foliage to dry before the nightfall.
- Set out transplants of Brussels sprouts started last month. These will mature for a fall harvest.
- To maximize top growth on asparagus, apply 2 pounds of 12-12-12 fertilizer per 100 sq. feet, water well and renew mulches to conserve moisture.
- Control corn earworms. Apply several drops of mineral oil every 3 to 7 days once silks appear. Sprays of B.T. are also effective.

FRUITS
- Oriental fruit moths emerge. Most serious on peaches where first generation attacks growing tips. Shoots will wilt. These should be pruned out.
- Thinning overloaded fruit trees will result in larger and heathier fruits at harvest time. Thinned fruits should be a hands width apart.
- Renovate strawberries after harvest. Mow the rows; thin out excess plants; remove weeds; fertilize, and apply mulch for weed control.
- Summer fruiting raspberries are ripening now.
- Begin control for apple maggot flies.
- Spray trunks of peach trees and other stone fruits for peach tree borers.
- Prune and train young fruit trees to eliminate poorly positioned branches and establish proper crotch angles.

- Missouri Botanical Garden -

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 1: Garden n’ Grow starts in Kirksville and runs through August 10.
June 2: Salt River Master Gardeners, tour of Hoffman Gardens, 1905 Kentucky St., Louisiana, MO, 6:00 p.m. There will be a short program on iris planting and care. If interested in car-pooling, meet at 5:15 p.m. at Sutherland’s parking lot. Short meeting after the tour. For info., contact Janet Miller, President 573-784-2584 or Cecelia Obert, Vice-President 573-822-5481.

June 27: Clark County/Kahoka Garden Tour, noon to 5 p.m., Tickets ($5) with directions to all five homes available at Kahoka town square that day.

August 2015: Master Gardener training in Kirksville; Wednesday, 1:00-4:00 pm. If interested in MG training contact me. We must have 10 to have a class. Master Gardener training is also offered online each semester. If you are not able to take MG training face-to-face due to scheduling conflicts, or live in a county too far from the training site, then consider taking the online training and doing it at your own pace. The next class will be offered in the September. Sign up on the state Master Gardener homepage at http://mg.missouri.edu/

September 11-13: State Master Gardener Conference, Stoney Creek Inn, Columbia.