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Blooms But No Vegetables

It is the time of year when our mouth is watering for the fresh vegetables produced in the garden. This can be very frustrating when the plants aren't giving us what we want in a timely manner. Mother Nature does not like to be rushed. Why do plants bloom leaving us without fruit to ripen?

The biggest culprits in the garden that deceive us are the cucumber, squash, tomato and watermelon. Three of these are related and behave in a similar fashion. The cucumber, squash and watermelon all produce a large vegetable for harvest but that vegetable is first pollinated on plants that contain both male and female flowers. That is to say the male flower blooms first followed by a second slightly different female flower. Each of these plants can be covered with blooms but not contain one female for pollination and therefore will not produce a vegetable. Be patient. The female flowers will appear and once they do each vine will produce 2 to 4 vegetables. Squash, as you may be aware, will produce many more vegetables once the female flower is pollinated and continue to do so until the end of the season or until the squash bugs win.

What about the tomato? The tomato plant can be very picky when it comes to committing to produce vegetables. Reasons why the plant may not provide fruit on the timeline that is preferred include the following. There is too much nitrogen – this favors growth of leaves not fruit. This may also cause fewer flowers which do not get pollinated and are unable to set. The tomato prefers temperatures between 70 and 85°F during the day. In our area of the state it seems that we go from 60 to 90°F overnight. This can play havoc with flower set on tomato. Complicate this further when you have different varieties maturing faster than others causing blooms to produce at different times. Tomatoes need a consistent supply of water. If they are stressed by a lack of water they may delay fruit set.

Tomatoes are pollinated as pollen is shaken from the flower. It may be done by a bee but it is more often done by wind. If the humidity is too low the pollen will not adhere and if the humidity is too high the pollen may not release from the flower.

While it can be frustrating to be patient, sometimes this is what needs to be done. Keep plants healthy and pest free and they will eventually produce those wonderful vegetables that we love to eat and enjoy.

The Extension office is open Monday - Friday, located in Kennett, Missouri at 233 North Main Street. For horticulture questions contact the horticulture specialist at 573-686-8064. MU is an equal opportunity/ADA institution.