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# The Grapevine

## They may be spooky, but Spiders are Beneficial to the Garden by Raymond Cloyd

Many people view spiders as pests, and the fear of spiders is one of the most common phobias among Americans. However, spiders are predators that feed on insect pests in gardens and landscapes. Kansas State University entomology expert Raymond Cloyd says that spiders feed on insects that may damage ornamental and vegetable crops. Consequently, they should be left alone and encouraged to take up residence in gardens and landscapes.

“There are two common species of garden spiders in Kansas that are active during the day,” Cloyd said. “The yellow garden spider and banded garden spider.” The yellow garden spider has a black abdomen with yellow markings and black legs with a yellow or red band, Cloyd said. The banded garden spider has continuous bands across the abdomen and legs, alternating white and dark with orange and black bands on the legs. Both spiders create large webs in gardens and landscapes. Garden spiders rely on vibrations that move through the web to indicate that prey have been captured. Cloyd recommends leaving garden spiders alone because they are beneficial and are not harmful to humans.



## Why do Leaves Turn Colors?



Fall is one of the most beautiful seasons as the leaves turn brilliant colors and the trees start to shed their leaves for the growing season. Have you ever wondered why leaves change color in the fall? Let's find out!

Most of the year the leaves on trees are green because of the green pigment in chlorophyll. This pigment allows the trees to produce the energy that they need to grow, bloom, and produce fruit. The other colors, except red and purple, needed for leaves to color in the fall are in the leaves already, masked by chlorophyll. The red and purple pigments are produced after the chlorophyll is destroyed. As fall progresses and certain weather conditions are met the leaves will develop an abscission layer at the base of the petiole, where the leaf attaches to the stem, which prevents sugars from being transported down the trunk to the roots for storage. As the sugars accumulate in the leaves the high concentration causes more intense colors. Certain trees, such as oaks and maples, naturally have more fall color than others and these types of trees tend to be more common in Michigan, New England, and other parts of the country than in Kansas. This makes it appear our native trees do not color as well however they simply have a different range of colors.

Weather does play a role in how well a tree colors in the fall. In years where we have cooler summers with adequate moisture, we have better fall color than in years with hot dry summers. Other weather conditions such as cloudy days and warm nights, heavy rains in the spring or fall, and frosts will also impact the amount of fall color we have and how long it hangs around.

## Reblooming Holiday Plants

Holiday cacti and poinsettias are relatively easy to help rebloom every year and holiday cacti will often bloom twice a year if conditions are right. It's time to provide these plants with the needed conditions to get beautiful blooms this winter.

Poinsettias and holiday cacti are short-day plants and require long nights to bloom. To get them to bloom you need to provide them with 13 hours of darkness over 6-8 weeks for the blooms to initiate. If you want your holiday plants to bloom for Thanksgiving or Christmas start providing those hours of darkness in late September or early October to encourage blooms. An easy way to do this is to use a cardboard box or black plastic trash bag over the top of the plants. Unlike poinsettias, there is another way to get holiday cacti to bloom. If holiday cacti have 6-8 weeks of cool night temperatures (55-65 degrees F) that will also encourage our cacti to initiate bloom buds. A cool garage, outside on a covered porch (be sure the temperatures don't get too cold) or a basement can provide the needed temperatures to encourage bloom buds.

Once you have bloom buds initiated be careful not to "shock" your plants as cool drafts, getting too dry, or too little humidity can cause the plant to drop their buds. The buds will last longer if kept in cooler temperatures; however, they will still provide a beautiful display under most home conditions.

Poinsettias and tropical cacti can be kept for decades, I have one Christmas cactus in my home that is well over 100 years old, and can provide a beautiful bloom display year after year. Once they are done blooming, treat them like a houseplant with bright indirect light and water when the top few inches of the soil dry out. Once our temperatures warm up in the spring, move the plants outside to an area that gets partial sun (3-6 hours of sunlight) and fertilize regularly.



## Insect of the Week- Praying Mantis



This week we are highlighting an insect commonly called the “guardians of the garden” for their habit of preying on undesirable insects. The Praying Mantis is a natural way to keep your gardens safe. These insects will eat anything they can grab onto with their raptorial front legs including flies, crickets, moths, butterflies, wasps, and caterpillars. There are two different types of praying mantis you might find in the state of Kansas. The first is the native Carolina mantid which is smaller in size and reaches approximately 2.5 inches long. This mantid can be gray, green, brown, or a combination of colors. They are a generalist predator that

eats a variety of insects. The second is the Chinese mantid, which can easily reach 3 to 5 inches long and is usually tan with a green line down the sides of its forewings. They are an ambush predator that will attack anything they can subdue including insects, snakes, hummingbirds, and small mammals.

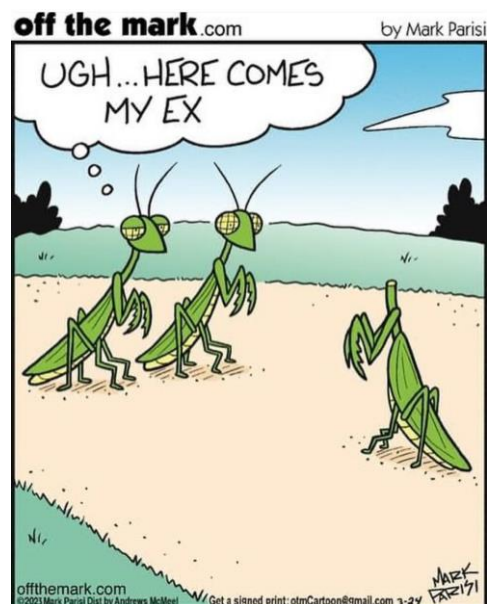
Both species of Preying mantids overwinter as egg cases which can often be found from November through April. The females lay between 200 and 300 eggs which are covered by a hardened, Styrofoam-like egg case or ootheca. These can often be found on branches, stems, walls, fences, sides of houses, and eaves. Egg cases vary in size and shape depending on the species. The egg case of the Carolina mantid is tan to light brown, about 1 inch long, and rectangular or elongated with a distinct white-to-gray band down the center of the egg case (see photo on the right). The Chinese mantid egg case



is light brown, approximately 1 ½ inches long, half domed in shape with one end tapered (see photo on the left). You can remove the egg case, bring them into the home, and place them into a glass jar with a lid with at least 10 small air holes. The warm temperatures inside the home will cause the nymphs to hatch from eggs in four to six weeks. You can delay egg hatching by placing the egg cases in a refrigerator and removing them one to two months before you want the eggs to hatch. This will ensure that nymphs are released when the weather is warm so there is no risk of exposure to cold

temperatures. The nymphs that emerge will be very hungry. Therefore, immediately release them into the garden, as long as they will not be exposed to freezing temperatures. However, if the nymphs are not released promptly or provided with a food source, they will eat each other (cannibalism) leaving just one large nymph that will not eat for a month. If you don't find any egg cases in your yard you can purchase them from garden centers or online sources.

Praying mantids can be a fun beneficial insect to have around your yard. Their unique form and the fact they eat other insects make them a welcome guest in the garden. If you find one, handle them with caution. They will bite and it does hurt. Keep an eye out for their egg cases around your house this winter and you may be rewarded with these helpful insects next year.



## Upcoming Events

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### Garden Hour Webinars:

October 2<sup>nd</sup>- Evergreens  
in Kansas

November 6<sup>th</sup>- Rabbit,  
Mole, and Deer  
Mitigation

December 4<sup>th</sup>- Home  
Hydroponics

## Upcoming Events:

September 29<sup>th</sup> 12 to 5  
pm  
Greater Andover Days  
Master Gardener Booth

October 9<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm  
Houseplant Care at  
Bradford Memorial  
Library

# Harvesting and Roasting Sunflower Seeds

K-State's Domenghini shares tips for the upcoming sunflower harvest and home roasting. It is sunflower season in the sunflower state and harvest is just around the corner, starting mid-September into October.

As seed heads begin to ripen, protecting them from birds is essential, said Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini, who recommends covering the heads once the petals begin turning brown with a paper sack or cheesecloth and securing the cover with a rubber band. "This will not only help keep the birds out but will prevent ripened seeds from dropping out of the head," she said.

Maturity is indicated by shriveled florets in the center of the flower disk, the backside of the head turning a lemon-yellow color, and heads facing down. "The ultimate check is to pull a few seeds to see if they have turned black with white stripes, the typical color," Domenghini said. If there are empty shells, this usually indicates a lack of pollination earlier in the year, she added.

To harvest the seeds, cut the heads and place them in a paper sack, or leave a foot of stem attached and hang the heads upside down to dry. Cover the heads to prevent seeds from dropping as they dry. Once the heads dry, seeds can be removed by rubbing gently.

### Roasting

Prepare the seeds for roasting by removing the shell and covering it with salted water (2 quarts of water to ¼ to 2 cups salt). Then, bring them to a boil and simmer for two hours, or soak in the salt solution overnight. Then, it is important to drain and dry the seeds on absorbent paper.

To roast the seeds, spread them in a shallow pan in a 300-degree Fahrenheit oven for 30-40 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the seeds from the oven when they appear golden brown, according to Domenghini. Seeds can be tossed in melted butter and salted if desired.

