

## Warmer Weather May Damage Spring Blooms

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RUTGERS, N.J. — Sixty-plus degrees in January. Precipitation well below normal. What effect might these unusual but not unheard of conditions have on plants?

Not unusual under these conditions are premature blossoms on spring-blooming plants such as forsythia and cherry. (I noted some plums in rather abundant bloom around the December holidays—an unexpected gift.) This winter bloom is generally sparse, so the spring show will not be noticeably reduced.

Some spring-flowering bulbs notably narcissus - are poking prematurely from the soil. It is unlikely that the flower display will be adversely affected, but leaves could be scorched if a deep freeze occurs. A blanket of straw or leaves might prevent the damage. Hopefully, other herbaceous perennials were mulched in December or early January to prevent plant heaving during freeze and thaw cycles.

Warm temperatures are a more serious potential threat to trees and shrubs. Our hardy woody plants survive winter by physiologically acclimating (hardening) to cold temperatures. This is a gradual process that can be interrupted by warm fall temperatures and can be partially reversed by warm winter temperatures. Plant damage can occur under these conditions when temperatures drop, especially if it happens suddenly.

The damage can take various forms from loss of buds and twigs to death of the living tissue in

trunks and stems. There is no practical way to prevent freeze damage due to erratic temperature extremes. To help prevent damage from freezing fall temperatures, avoid fall fertilization, excessive irrigation and pruning that can delay hardening off.

The dry weather we've experienced since mid-summer can take an extra toll during winter. Evergreens are especially vulnerable. They lose water from their leaves during winter, especially under sunny and/or warm and/or windy conditions. If soil is dry or frozen so there is not enough water available to replace that lost from leaves, leaf scorch, even stem death, can result. Prevention includes making sure these plants go into winter with adequate soil moisture. If wind exposure is compounding the problem, install a temporary screen.

Roots in dry soil may freeze. Roots are less hardy than the tops of trees and shrubs, but soil usually provides adequate protection. Temperature will change more rapidly in dry soil than in moist soil, and, especially when there is no insulating snow cover, the temperature in dry soil can drop to root-damaging levels when a deep freeze persists for a few days. This is another reason to make sure plants go into winter with moist soil. Proper mulching can help conserve soil moisture.

Predicting exactly what toll last fall and this winter will exact on our landscapes is impossible. But I will not be surprised if a fair amount of winter damage shows up this spring.

## Consumer Acceptance Of Irradiated Beef Grows

DENVER, Colo. — Consumer acceptance of irradiated ground beef is growing, according to a checkoff-funded study conducted on behalf of the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB). The study, which measured consumer perceptions about irradiated ground beef, revealed a sizeable potential market for the product.

Irradiation can virtually eliminate *E. coli* O157:H7 and greatly reduce other pathogens, enhancing the safety of ground beef. The technology was approved for use on white potatoes in 1965, fruit and vegetables in 1986, pork in 1986, poultry in 1990, and beef in 1997.

Researchers found that a person's acceptance of irradiated beef was greatly influenced by initial perceptions. Four consumer segments were identified: strong buyers (27 percent of the test group), interested (34 percent), doubters (24 percent) and rejecters (15 percent). The first three are potential markets for irradiated ground beef, and by implementing consumer education

programs and continuing product quality research, this market should continue to grow.

Nearly all the "strong buyers" were ready to buy irradiated ground beef before the study, more likely to buy it after trying it and willing to pay ten cents a pound more for it. The "rejecter" segment snubbed placebo ground beef patties non-irradiated burgers that were labeled as irradiated in the study as often as the irradiated patties. The study said no amount of information would convince this group, which generally rejects any new product.

The good news is, on average, there were no palatability issues in the consumers' eyes," says John Lundeen, a managing director/partner at the Sterling Rice Group, which conducted the independent study along with Talmey-Drake Research and Strategy, Inc. "There is a market for this if it's supplied as a choice in supermarkets and there's even a broader market for it in food-service.

"There is a good core who

want to buy it and another group who are on the fence," Lundeen says. "As it's provided as a choice, there are other people who over time will become more comfortable with the concept. The upsides outweigh that minority that is not comfortable with this."

To gain greater acceptance of irradiated ground beef by those sitting on the fence, the study said the beef industry must address color issues irradiation tends to turn patties darker and more reddish brown.

There are also consumers who have a problem with the word "irradiation," which they erroneously connect to "radiation," even though irradiation uses electron beam technology (electricity). Research showed that changing the name would help but federal government approval would be required first.

An early 1990s study at Purdue University found that more than 90 percent of consumers were willing to buy foods processed with irradiation once they understood the process.

## Capital Area Beekeepers Offer Short Course In Beekeeping

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The Capital Area Beekeepers Association is offering the 15th annual short course in Basic Beekeeping. This popular two-day short course is scheduled for Saturday, May 11, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Dauphin County Agriculture and Nature Center, in Dauphin; and Saturday, May 18, from noon to 5 p.m., at the Milton Hershey Farm Conference Center and Apiary, in Hershey.

This course is sponsored by the association in cooperation with the Penn State Cooperative Extension. The course faculty in-

cludes cooperative extension apiculturist, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture apiary inspectors, and expe-

rienced and qualified members of the association.

Each registered attendee will receive a packet of beginning beekeeping information, as well as other course-related handouts.

Having a package of bees and the opportunity to get hands-on experience in an operating apiary will be two of the several highlights of the course.

Topics will include bee-ology, diseases, parasites and pests, equipment, hive management, harvesting and marketing, by-products of the hive, apiary location and setup, colony inspection, and colony manipulation.

Table displays of beekeeping equipment, books and periodicals, and other beekeeping topics will be offered. A random drawing will award the hived package

of bees and other door prizes to beginning beekeepers. Refreshments breaks will feature homemade foods made with honey.

This course will assist new beekeepers in getting started, as well as provide the latest information to current beekeepers. Many experienced beekeepers will be in attendance to assist in responding to questions and concerns. A certificate of completion will be awarded to each new beekeeper completing the course.

Preregistration is requested before Monday, May 6, and the course fee is \$25 per person. Participants are encouraged to bring a bee veil and protective suite, if possible. A brown bag lunch is suggested, although, fast-food restaurants are located nearby. For a registration form, location

map, and lodging information, contact Sam Albright, 605 South Mountain Road, Dillsburg, PA 17019, or call (717) 432-2628.



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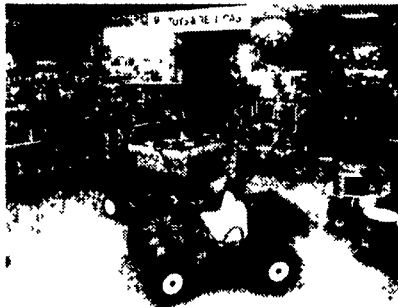
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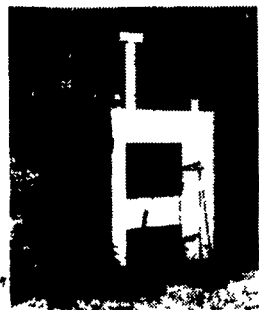


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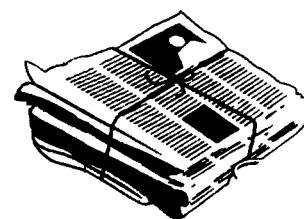
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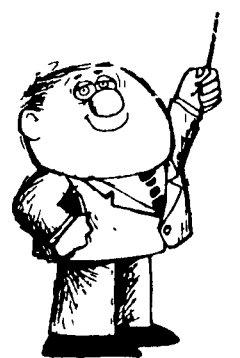


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