

AG NOTES
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FARMERS MARKET

We are going to open this week, Thursday, July 7, at 2:30 pm. The market pavilion is next to the big blue water tower at the Celebration Grounds across from Calsonic Arena.

We don't know what to expect in terms of vendors and volume of vegetables and other products, but we will open anyway. This has been a very difficult season for growers and some have replanted the third time.

But we'll be there.

HEAT AND PLANTS

Dr. Annette Wszelaki, one of our good vegetable specialists with UT Extension, shared this last week. She had been getting asked questions about tomatoes, and I had these same questions over the past month. Here is what she shared.

The main question was "We're noticing that we're losing tomato blooms. What could be causing this?"

There are several factors that can contribute to this problem. With the unusually hot weather we have had, this would be the most likely culprit. Tomatoes like hot weather, but not too hot. If it's too hot (or too cold), tomatoes will not set fruit. When the daytime temperatures climb above 95° F, many tomatoes will have difficulty or fail to set fruit. Even more critical is the nighttime temperature. Tomatoes prefer nighttime temperatures between 59-68° F. When nighttime temperatures remain above 70° F, many varieties fail to set fruit.

In Tennessee, it's not uncommon to have high temperatures during fruit set, so what can you do? There are varieties that have been bred for heat tolerance for both commercial producers and home gardeners. Solar Fire is a heat tolerant variety bred at the University of Florida. While it has heat tolerance, it is also a bit soft, so it would work better as a local market tomato rather than a shipper. Heatwave II is an older heat tolerant variety. Florida 91 was shown to perform well in the heat in high tunnels. Bella Rosa, Phoenix, and Tribute are other heat tolerant varieties.

A couple of other environmental factors can inhibit fruit set: too much water or not enough water. If there is excessive rain during flowering, pollen grains can clump together, and this prevents proper pollination. Low humidity (rare in TN) and drought can also contribute to poor fruit set. Make sure to keep your tomatoes adequately watered.

Another common cause of blossom-drop or failure to set fruit is excess nitrogen. When you have nice, dark green vigorous plants with little or no fruit, overfertilizing could be the cause. These overly healthy plants are putting all of their energy into the vine. Every plant needs nutrients to grow, but don't overdo it.

Lastly, light level can influence tomato fruit set. For urban growers that live in the city, continuous light can be a problem. When planning where to put your tomatoes, avoid sites that are under lights that remain on all night, such as security lights or street lights. While tomatoes do not like constant light, they do like full sunlight during the day. They will tolerate some shade, but too much will also cause poor fruit set.

The good news is that now that night temperatures are back down in that 59-68° F range and under 95° during the day, tomato fruit production will pick back up.

(I new that heat was a bad problem with corn pollination, but this was the first time I had learned of tomatoes having the same issues. Never too old to learn something!)

BEDFORD COUNTY FAIR

The fair is the week of July 18- 23. We will be taking in entries on Sunday, July 17, from 1-5 pm. We have fair books with all of the information for entries and events. Come by the office at 2105 Midland Road and pick one up.

We have been asked to bring hay samples from our fair to the Tennessee State Fair in August that is being held in conjunction with the Wilson County Fair in Lebanon. I know that hay is short, but there are several categories for competition. I am going to be taking these hay exhibits up so all you have to do is to enter the Bedford County Fair hay exhibits. Please contact me about the details. We must have a flake of hay in a mesh bag, and I have those. Let's do this!

There is one big change in the schedule for the fair this year. We will have the dairy show on Monday like before. We will have the beef show for all breeds on Tuesday. In the past we have had the Angus and Red Angus on Thursday, but this year all of the breeds will be on Tuesday. Sheep will continue on Friday, and the regional 4-H/FFA goat show will be on Saturday. Be sure to help spread the word on the new beef show schedule.

One other reminder is that the 4-H Chick Chain pullets will be sold on Monday the 18th. The auction sale will be at 6:00 pm. These pullets are always popular, and many will be laying by time for the sale. This benefits the 4-H club and the members who raise them. Contact me or Sean Giffin at 931-684-5971 for the details. These birds will sell in groups of 2 or 3, so make plans to come to the sale.