

The Green Scene

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My Cucumber Plants are Blooming Heavily, but Aren't Producing Many Fruit. Why?

Question:

My cucumber plants are blooming heavily, but aren't producing many fruit. Why?

Answer:

Cucumbers and other vine crops are monoecious. Monoecious plants have separate male and female flowers on the same plant. Male and female flowers are similar in appearance. However, the female flowers have small, immature fruits at their base. Pollen is transferred from the male to the female flowers by bees and other pollinators. When properly pollinated and fertilized, the female flowers develop into fruit. The first flowers to appear on cucumbers and other vine crops are predominantly male. As a result, fruit production is poor when the vines begin to flower. The cucumber vines should start producing a good crop within a few weeks as the number of female flowers increase.

Poor weather and use of insecticides can also affect the fruit set on cucumbers. Cold, rainy weather during bloom reduces bee activity. Fewer bees visiting the garden results in poor pollination and poor fruit set. Apply insecticides in the garden only when necessary to avoid harming bees and other pollinators.

Want more tips, tricks, and articles? Go to hortnews.extension.iastate.edu

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Extension and Outreach

Where are the Lighting Bugs?

By Donald Lewis

It's still too early to know what the lighting bug population will be this year. Be patient. A few adults have already been spotted, but most lighting bugs arrive around the Fourth of July. Adults live for a few weeks, during which time they must attract a mate (the purpose of the light!), mate, and lay eggs. In most years, lighting bug population fades quickly, and most are gone by the end of July.

The Oddity of Insect Names

Lighting bugs are also called fireflies which is peculiar because they are neither bugs nor flies. Lighting bugs are beetles. They are soft-shelled beetles rather than the familiar hard and crunchy beetles such as June bugs and Japanese beetles. You can prove they are beetles by examining the top side. When you are done admiring the light-emitting segments at the end of the underside of the abdomen, turn the firefly over and notice how the wing covers meet in a line down the middle of the back. The line-down-the-back is a characteristic of almost all of the beetles.

The summertime enjoyment of watching lightning bugs twinkle and dance across the lawn, field, or garden appears to be on the decline. At least for some of us. Lighting bugs, like most insects, vary greatly from year to year and place to place. Some people ask why there are so many lighting bugs, while others ask, in very next phone call, how come they haven't seen any.

One possible answer for the low numbers of lightning bugs to blame the weather (what else is new?). Lighting bugs have a complete life cycle, and the larvae thrive in damp locations such as under mulch and plant debris, where they feed on snails, slugs, worms, and other small critters. Yes, lightning bug larvae are cold-blooded predators, making them beneficial if they are eating the slugs from under your Hosta plants. Dry weather and droughts during the fall of the past few years may be interfering with lightning bug reproduction and survival. Less moisture on the ground means fewer suitable habitats for lightning bug larvae and less food.

We want lighting bug displays that rival the memories of our youth, but that might be wishful thinking. Instead, for best viewing chances, drive to a natural area in the country on a warm, humid, July evening, park safely off the traveled portion of the road, and hope for a dazzling display.

More about lighting bugs is in our online article at <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/lightningbugs>

