



## Pest Corner

September, 2007

### Berry Safety

Fall is when we see native and cultured plants with many colorful berries. Information about their potential toxicity is available from the Washington Poison Control Center (<http://www.wapc.org/>) 1-800-222-1222.

Important facts to remember include:

1. Plants and plant parts are not necessarily safe to humans because birds and animals eat these without becoming ill.
2. Cooking poisonous berries does not make them edible. Heating or cooking does not destroy any toxic substances.
3. Bad tasting berries are not necessarily poisonous.
4. Good tasting berries are not always safe food for humans -- some good tasting ones are very toxic!
5. When berries are safe for consumption, be aware that the rest of the plant might not be edible. Conversely, some plants have edible/safe and poisonous parts (as in rhubarb).
6. It is impossible to remove all poisonous plants from our environment in order to prevent accidental poisoning. Learning and teaching about toxic and safe plants is one of the best prevention activities.

**Tips on wild blackberry vines:** Getting completely rid of these requires cutting back the canes (by hand or using equipment) and digging out the roots. Treat any re-appearing new foliage with glyphosate (generic for Round-up) in September. During Fall, herbicide applications are very effective when plants are beginning to move carbohydrates from the leaves back to the roots for winter dormancy. Apply the herbicide when the new growth is about a foot tall so there is enough live tissue to respond to the chemical. Apply per label instructions and guidelines.

## **Ripening Tomatoes**

These go through several stages of development during their maturation. During early stages, the fruit continues to grow in size and remains green, typically requiring 40-50 days. Once the fruit has reached full size (called "mature green"), changes in pigment begin to take place causing the green to fade to light green and then to the appropriate pigments for that cultivar, be it red, pink, yellow or orange.

Ripening and color development in tomatoes need warm temperatures (69-77 degrees F), and the presence of ethylene (a plant hormone). Temperatures outside the optimum range for extended periods are stressful to the plant and the ripening process halts. When temperatures remain above 85 degrees F for extended periods, tomatoes do not produce the pigments lycopene and carotene. The fruit often appears yellowish green to yellowish orange.

Tomatoes picked when light green (with a bit of blush is better) can be ripened off the vine at 60-65 degrees F, or warmer. Pack fruits in shallow layers and keep in well-aerated location at this temperature range.

## **Powdery Mildew**

Warm days, cool nights and humid conditions are ideal for the development of this fungal disease in native plants, ornamental flowers and shrubs, grasses, fruit trees, and vegetables. The disease thrives in crowded plantings where air circulation is poor as well as in damp and shaded areas. Powdery mildew usually disappears in warm, dry weather.

Environmental controls can make conditions less favorable for the disease. For instance, space plantings to permit good air circulation. Also, avoid or improve poorly drained soils and correct damp areas.

Chemical control of powdery mildew is effective. Since most of the mildew fungus is external to the plant, this disease is one of the few that can be controlled after the infection has occurred. Several fungicides are available for mildew control. Sulfur, either as a dust or spray, is perhaps the most widely used. Sulfur may injure some plants, especially if temperatures are above 90 degrees F.

Adapted by Cecilia from recent articles by Don Tapio, Grays Harbor County Extension Agent.