



“Weather” or not for insects

This has been a very strange year for gardening as far as the weather is concerned. Our cool, rainy weather suddenly gave way to a heat spell. Then more rain, now very warm. All this uncertainty has an effect on not only our plants, but our insect population as well. Species that would normally emerge (such as the Saturniid moth I raise) are a month late in emerging from their overwintering stages. The progeny of these late arrivals may not make it to their resting stage before their food is gone and the winter sets in.

Other insects, such as the chinch bug have prospered because of the hot weather recently. They have completed their life cycle earlier this year and are beginning to invade homes because of their tremendous numbers. On the other hand, spiders have not been brought into the MG office in any quantity, lately. Maybe it's a little early due to the unusual weather, or maybe not many of the fledgling spiders survived the rains and heat. We'll see!

The butterflies were minimal on our property this year. I attribute this to our late, wet spring. Fatal disease in the caterpillars becomes prevalent when adverse conditions occur. This may have occurred in our swallowtail butterfly populations. Also, many other species are scarce due to the same reason. Many of the moth species I rear each year were hit particularly hard by the strange weather phenomena. Many larvae succumbed to viral insect diseases that normally would not affect them. The food plants that they feed on are stressed and diseased this year as well, decreasing the nutritional value for the caterpillars.

The ecological niches opened by the decline of insect species may invite invasive species, such as the brown marmorated stink bug, accidentally imported from Asia, to increase in number and become serious pests. Agriculture could suffer due to this type of shift in the environment and the stress put on field crops.

Look for more disease organisms on your own garden plants, fewer seeds (due to fewer insect pollinators this year) and a lot less butterflies to grace your garden. Hopefully, next year will begin a new, brighter chapter, with the seasons returning back to normal. There is hope for the future!

