

The Results Are In On Summer Experiments

By **CHRIS SMITH | SOUND GARDENER**

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Over the summer I ran two experiments — one in my tomato patch, the other in my apple orchard. Results are in, not all of them expected.

Months before the experiment began, Nick Penovich, aka "The Lawn Jockey," made me an offer I couldn't refuse. If I'd run a controlled experiment with compost tea as a control for late blight, he'd provide the tea.

So at 10-day to two-week intervals from mid June through September, Nick pulled his colorful truck into my driveway. On each visit, he thoroughly doused four Early Girl plants with the tea he brews, and either he or I provided a roughly equal drink of plain water to the four Early Girls designated as the control group.

Though blight was rampant in my garden last year, it didn't turn up this year on either the tea drinkers or the water drinkers. Perhaps this year's dry summer discouraged the disease. In any case, the experiment was inconclusive.

There was an interesting side effect of the tea. In early September, Nick and I noticed the tea-treated plants were carrying about double the number of fruits as the watered plants. About a week later, I made an accurate count: the four treated plants had 110 fruits aboard while the watered plants had 53.

Perhaps nutrients in the tea account for these results. Another possibility advanced by many tea makers and users is that tea enhances the uptake of nutrients already in the soil.

I'd have to design a different experiment involving nutrient analysis of the tea and provision of similar strength nutrients to the control group to test these hypotheses.

If any of you has conducted controlled experiments with compost tea, particularly on its effectiveness against late blight, I'd be interested in hearing your results.

One King County Master Gardener who's conducted three years of controlled tests with aerated compost tea sent me his findings. He concluded there isn't enough benefit, either in productivity or disease control to justify the expense, time and labor involved in using it.

Red Sticky Traps for Apple Maggot

For years I've used butyl hexanoate scent lures with the red sticky traps I deploy to control apple maggots. Butyl hexanoate attracts apple maggot flies by imitating the scent of ripe apples.

I wondered if the real Red Delicious apples I skewer, smear with Tangletrap and hang in my trees as traps would emit enough ripe apple scent to attract flies without expensive butyl hexanoate scent lures dangling nearby.

In the future, I'll save money by dispensing with lures for my red apple traps. I'll put some of the money saved toward additional traps for each tree, with the aim of more complete catch of the flies.

Chris Smith answers questions of general interest in his columns. You can reach him at P.O. Box 4426, South Colby, WA 98384.