

## **THE GRAPEVINE**

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### **Soil Testing**

Most gardeners think that soil tests are done only to find out what nutrients are deficient. However, it is just as important to know if you have adequate levels of nutrients so you don't add unneeded fertilizer. The most basic soil test checks pH and the levels of phosphorus and potassium. Most of the lawn and garden soil tests that come out of our soil-testing lab show more than adequate levels of both phosphorus and potassium. If those nutrients are not needed, applying them is a waste of money and can be a source of pollution. In extreme cases, excess phosphorus can interfere with the uptake of micronutrients. So, if you haven't taken a soil test in several years, take one this spring. Begin by taking a representative sample from a number of locations in the garden or lawn that goes from the surface to 6 to 8 inches deep. Mix the samples together in a clean container and select about 1 pint of soil. For more detail on taking a soil test, [click here](#). Take the soil to your local K-State Research and Extension office to have tests done at the K-State soil-testing laboratory for a small fee. A soil test determines fertility problems, not other conditions that may exist such as poor drainage, poor soil structure, soil borne diseases or insects, chemical contaminants or damage, or shade with root competition from other plants. All of these conditions may reduce plant performance but cannot be evaluated by a soil test.

### **Hanging Baskets & Annual Flowers Program**

Have you noticed the beautiful hanging baskets in Downtown El Dorado the past several years? These are one example of what can be done with hanging baskets and other containers. Rita Arnold of Arnolds Greenhouses in LeRoy, KS will present a program on Tuesday, February 28th at 6:30 pm at the 4-H building in El Dorado. She will be covering the different strategies for container plants and hanging baskets and the annual flowers that do best in them. From what fertilizer to use and how often to use it, to the different types of containers that can be used and how those are put together, she will answer all your questions on the subject.

There will be a \$5 fee for this program and light refreshments will be served. To register please call the Butler County Extension office at (316)321-9660 by February 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Planting Asparagus**

Though it is too early to plant asparagus, it is not too early to make plans and prepare soil. This crop is a perennial and will survive for many years if given proper care. It prefers full sun and a well-drained soil and is usually placed on the edge of the garden area so that there is no need to till around the area to plant other crops. Proper soil prep is especially important for perennial crops. Take a soil test to ensure proper levels of nutrients. Work the soil as early in the spring as possible but do not work wet soil as clods will form. Then add two inches of organic matter to the surface and the fertilizer and work again so the organic matter and fertilizer are blended into the soil.

Asparagus can be propagated from seed but is more often started from 1-year-old crowns. These crowns are planted deeply; about 8 inches deep either in a hole for each crown or in a trench. Space plants 18 to 24 inches apart. Fill in the trench gradually over the growing season to encourage growth. March 15 to April 15 is the best planting time. Adapted varieties include Jersey Giant, Jersey King, Jersey Knight, Jersey Supreme and Purple Passion. These are all male hybrids that will produce three times as much as our old Martha or Mary Washington varieties. Males have a number of advantages over females in that they live longer, emerge earlier in the spring, are more productive and eliminate potential volunteer plants that can reduce the productivity of a planting. Weed control is very important. Competition with weeds results in slow establishment. A shallow hoeing should be all that is needed.

## **Lawn Calendar for Cool-Season Grasses**

The following suggestions are for cool-season grasses like Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue.

March: Spot treat broadleaf weeds if necessary. Treat on a day that is 50 degrees or warmer. Rain or irrigation within 24 hours of application will reduce effectiveness.

April: Apply crabgrass preventer when redbud trees are in full bloom, usually in April. The preventer needs to be watered in before it will start to work. One-quarter inch of water will be enough to water in any of the products mentioned in this calendar. Remember that a good, thick lawn is the best weed prevention and may be all that is needed.

May: Fertilize with a slow-release fertilizer if you water your lawn or if you normally receive enough rainfall that your turf doesn't go drought-dormant during the summer. If there are broadleaf weeds, spot treat with a spray or use a fertilizer that includes a weed killer. Rain or irrigation within 24 hours of application will reduce effectiveness of the weed killer, but the fertilizer needs to be watered in. If you are using a product that has both fertilizer and weed killer, wait 24 hours after application before watering in.

June through Mid-July: Apply second round of crabgrass preventer by June 15 - unless you have used Dimension (dithiopyr) or Barricade (proflumicarb) for the April application. These two products normally provide season-long control with a single application. Remember to water it in. If grubs have been a problem in the past, apply a product containing imidacloprid during the first half of July. This works to prevent grub damage. It must be watered in before it becomes active.

Late-July through August: If you see grub damage, apply a grub killer that contains Dylox. Imidacloprid is effective against young grubs but may not be effective on late instar grubs. The grub killer containing Dylox must be watered in within 24 hours or effectiveness drops.

September: Fertilize around Labor Day. Water in the fertilizer.

November: Fertilize. This fertilizer is taken up by the roots but is not used until the following spring. Water in fertilizer. Spray for broadleaf weeds even if they are small. Broadleaf weeds are much easier to control in the fall than in the spring. Spray on a day that is at least 50 degrees. Rain or irrigation within 24 hours reduces effectiveness. Use label rates for all products!

## **Fertilizing Spring-Flowering Bulbs**

The best time to fertilize spring-flowering bulbs is when foliage emerges in the spring rather than at flowering. Traditionally, gardeners have applied fertilizer during bloom or a bit after, but because bulb roots start to die at flowering, fertilizer applied at bloom is wasted. Roots are active when the foliage first pokes through the ground. Nutrients applied then help the plant produce flowers the following year. If bulbs have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium in the soil. It is best to use a soil test to be certain. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 lbs. per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 lbs. per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Lawn fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 can be used, but cut the rate by a third. Also make sure the lawn fertilizer does not contain a weed preventer or weed killer. Leave the foliage until it dies naturally. The energy in the foliage is transferred to the bulb as the foliage dies and will help bloom next year.