

CENTRAL KANSAS MARKET VEGETABLE GROWERS WORKSHOP

Locally grown vegetables are fresh, delicious, and can boost the local economy. The 6th annual Central Kansas Market Vegetable Growers Workshop, sponsored by Sedgwick, Butler, Harvey, and Reno County Extension, will give both beginning and experienced vegetable growers new skills to improve their production methods and marketing skills for selling their local vegetables, while meeting an increasing demand for locally grown produce. The workshop will be held Saturday, February 7, 2015 from 8:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. in 4-H Hall at the Sedgwick County Extension Education Center at 21st and Ridge in Wichita. Cost of registration is \$20 by January 31st and \$25 after that. The registration deadline is Thursday, February 5th. Register online at

<http://2015ckmvgw.eventbrite.com/>

or by calling 316-660-0100. The workshop will cover the basic vegetable and fruit production issues, as well as special topics related to beekeeping, growing cut flowers, and wildlife pest control. The Keynote Speaker is Scott Thellman of Juniper Hill Farms in Lawrence, KS. He will be sharing how the farm has grown through selling vegetables in outlets other than the Farmers' Market.

Lunch will be provided.

Bringing Houseplants Down to Size

We sometimes receive calls from gardeners who wish to donate houseplants that have outgrown their location. In most cases, we don't have room to accept plants and suggest that people bring them down to size by air-layering. Air-layering is a process where a branch or the main stem is encouraged to form roots while still attached to the parent plants. After rooting, the original plant is discarded and the newly rooted one is potted as a replacement. Though this propagation technique cannot be used on all houseplants, it does work well on many that tend to outgrow their boundaries including croton, dracaena, dieffenbachia, Norfolk Island pine, rubber plant and schefflera. Choose wood that is about 1 year old. Older or more immature wood often roots poorly, if at all. Any place on the stem that is of the proper maturity can be used, but a convenient location is often about 12 inches from the tip. Following are the steps required for air-layering:

- Leaves should be removed around the area to be air-layered.

- Wound the stem. This can be done by making a slanting cut upward, an inch or more in length and halfway through the stem. Place a portion of a toothpick in the cut so it cannot close and heal. If the stem is seriously weakened, use a stick "splint" to prevent breakage. Another method that works is to strip the bark completely around the stem in a band ½ to 1 inch wide.

- Apply rooting hormone to the wounded surface of the cut or the stripped portion of the branch.

- Pack a baseball-sized wad of moist, unmilled sphagnum peat moss around the wounded area so it forms a ball. This is where new roots will form. It is important to use the long, stringy unmilled peat moss rather than the more common milled material so peat moss does not fall away from the stem when released. Even unmilled peat moss may need to be secured with string to keep it in place.

- Wrap the ball of sphagnum peat moss with clear plastic wrap. Be sure to use enough wrap so that the plastic overlaps and prevents the ball from drying out. Secure the top and bottom edges of the wrap closed with electrical tape, string or other convenient fasteners.

Roots may appear in as little as a month though it may take much longer for the plant to be ready for transplanting. Check periodically to be sure peat moss remains moist. Water if needed. When roots have filled the peat moss, the plant is ready to be severed from the parent and transplanted.

Fruit Trees and Frost

Spring in Kansas is often unsettled with apricot and peach tree flowers being the most vulnerable to late frosts. Of course, the tree itself will be fine but there will be no to little fruit for that year. Other species of trees can also be affected but apricots and peaches are by far the most sensitive. Also, the closer a tree is to full bloom, the more sensitive it becomes to frost.

Apricots are more likely to have frost kill flowers than peaches because they bloom a bit earlier. Though there are late-blooming apricot varieties, the differences between full bloom on early- and late-blooming varieties appears to be slight. Research at Virginia Tech in the 90's showed a maximum of a 4-day difference between early and late varieties. However, in some years that may be all that is needed. The trees in the study that were considered late blooming included Hungarian Rose, Tilton and Harlayne.

Peaches are next on the list for being likely to be caught by a late frost. With peaches, two characteristics become important when considering whether they will be damaged by late frosts. Like apricots, bloom time is very important but fruit bud hardiness is also important.

In this case, fruit bud hardiness refers to hardiness to late frosts rather than the ability to survive extreme low temperatures during the winter. Late bloomers included 'China Pearl', 'Encore', 'Intrepid', and 'Risingstar.'

So, are there other considerations when looking at possible frost damage? Location can be very important. Planting on a hill which allows cold air to drain to lower elevations can help. Also, a location in town will be more likely to have a warmer microclimate than an exposed location. Some gardeners will add a heat source under a tree during cold nights if they are close to a building. Heat lamps and charcoal briquettes are sometimes used but safety should be the first consideration.