

The Grapevine

Fall Perennial Care

Fall is coming and hopefully we are on the downhill slide as far as temperatures go. With the cooler temperatures we have an opportunity to complete some tasks that we haven't felt like, or been able to do with the heat that we have had over the summer. As temperatures cool it's time to give our perennial flower beds some care and attention. There are several tasks that we can accomplish over the next few months that will help our perennials and ornamental grasses thrive for years to come.

If your perennials didn't bloom as well this year (granted the weather could have played a role in that) or they are getting too big for their space, fall is an excellent time to dig your perennials up and divide them into smaller clumps. Some perennials, such as daylilies, really do best if divided every four to five years to maintain flower production and while others need dividing to keep them somewhat in check. Other plants such as ornamental grasses will develop a dead spot in the middle if not divided periodically to maintain the vigor of the plant. September is an excellent time to dig these plants up and divide them into smaller clumps. Use a sharp spade and dig the entire clump up then use the spade to cut the clump into smaller pieces. Make sure each clump is at least 6" to ensure enough root system to create a vigorous new growth. You can then plant one clump back in the original spot and use the others in different spots in the yard or give them away to friends to expand their garden.



Peonies are a spring favorite of many people. While a peony can be left in one spot indefinitely and continue to grow and thrive you can divide them to expand your peony collection or move them to a new spot. Peonies are easy to divide in the fall because they have essentially gone dormant by mid-August even if the leaves are still green. To divide a peony, you should first remove all the foliage and then dig the entire plant up. Shake or wash all the soil off the clump till you can see the pink buds or "eyes" of the plant. Unlike dividing other perennials, you will need to use a sharp knife to cut up the peony roots as they are very tough. Make sure each clump has at least 3 eyes but four would be best. Plant the new clumps in locations that get at least a half day of full sun, but the more the better overall. Make sure the pink

buds are only an inch below the surface. If planted any deeper you might delay flowering or there will be no flowers at all.

While it might be tempting with the cooler temperatures to fertilize your perennials this fall, it's best to wait. In the fall we want our perennials to be preparing to go dormant which means you want to prevent lush thick growth going into the winter months. It is important to continue to water perennials unless we start to receive rainfall but hold off on the fertilizer. Now is also the time to be watering our spring blooming shrubs such as lilacs, forsythia, mock orange and others as they are currently setting their bloom buds for the spring season. Water once or twice week deeply as opposed to every day with just a little bit of water for the best results.

While it's easy to forget about the fall tasks there are a few things we can do now that will help our plants thrive through the winter and into the next growing season. Take this fall time to expand your perennial garden by dividing plants or give a gift to friends to help them get started on their gardening journey. Enjoy the slightly cooler weather and I hope you have a wonderful Labor Day with your friends and family. Happy growing everyone!!



Pollinator Plant of the Week-

This week's pollinator plant of the week is are upright sedums. These beauties are one of the most reliable food sources for pollinators in the fall garden. This sedum is a native of China and is a relative of the many different types of sedums that are common in the landscape. This perennial is upright in growth with thick fleshy green leaves. About mid-summer the sedum starts to develop pink bloom buds in large clusters at the end of the stems. These blooms will open in late summer to early fall and bloom for several weeks. This perennial is one of my favorites because it is easy to grow and relatively care free. Plant them in full sun (although they will grow in partial shade) and well drained soil. Sedums don't like wet soils and will rot easily. They also do best in slightly poorer soil conditions as they can get too tall and fall over in overly rich conditions. There are a variety of different upright sedums, the most common is a variety called "Autumn Joy" however there are new selections that have a range of bloom colors from white to purple and a variety of leaf colors.



Insect of the Week-

This week's insect of the week is the Sunflower Head Clipping Weevil. This little insect is really cool even if the damage it causes ruins perfectly good sunflowers. The sunflower head clipping weevil is a black weevil about 1.0 cm (1/3 inches) long with a long, curved snout and relatively soft wing covers. Typically, you won't see the weevil until they have started to cause damage to the sunflowers. The adults girdle flower peduncles and leaf petioles leaving partially severed flowers or leaves hanging on the plant similar to the picture on the right. When severed flower heads are opened, they often reveal mating aggregations of adult weevils covered in pollen.



This insect is easy to diagnose with its distinctive damage caused to the sunflower. There is only one generation of this insect in a given year and adults typically start showing up about the time sunflowers start to mature in late July to early August. Treatment for these weevils depends on the amount of damage they are causing. One thing you should be sure to do is collect all of the clipped heads and dispose of them in the dumpster or burn them. The weevil larvae develop in the decomposing head after it is clipped and then they leave to overwinter in the soil. By removing all clipped heads, you can help get the population lower next year and onward. If there are just a few its probably best to leave them alone however if they are causing significant damage to your sunflowers you can spray. Any generic insect/garden spray will kill the weevils, the trick is to only spray the back of the heads of the sunflower which is where the weevils will be found. If you spray the front you won't get any control since the weevils won't encounter the spray. I would also spray in early to late evening when pollinators are less likely to visit the flowers.

Reminders-

- Water lawns and flower beds 1-2 times or approximately ½-1" of moisture every week.
- Scout for Fall Armyworms. They haven't been spotted yet but early detection prevents more damage.
- Spray areas to seed cool season grasses now to plant in September. Water a few days before spraying for the best results.
- Harvest winter squash when skin is hard enough that it is not easily punctured with a thumbnail.
- Remove small tomatoes from vines to encourage development of more mature fruits.
- Plant garden chrysanthemums for fall color.

Upcoming Events

- **September 7, 2022: Recommended Trees for Kansas**

Often the shade, beauty, and other benefits of a tree aren't fully appreciated until decades after a tree is planted. As a result, picking the right tree for the right place becomes even more critical. Join Dr. Jason Griffin, Woody Ornamentals Horticulture Extension Specialist, as he highlights some of the best trees for Kansas and the surrounding region. The KSRE Garden hour sessions are held via Zoom starting at noon. For more information or to register [click here](#).

- **October 5, 2022: Improving Soil Health in the Landscape and Garden**

Is your landscape and garden soil healthy? Learn how to measure and improve your soil's health in the home landscape and garden. Dr. DeAnn Presley, Professor and Extension Specialist for Environmental Soil Science and Management, will explore ways to improve your soil, including cover crops and soil amendments. Learn how to build your soil's organic matter, and improve the growing potential of your soil. The KSRE Garden hour sessions are held via Zoom starting at noon. For more information or to register [click here](#).