

The Grapevine

Lessons Learned

It's county fair week in our office, which as weird as it sounds is one of my favorite parts of my job as an extension agent. I love looking at all the cool ideas that the youth have come up with and talking with them about their projects. I always enjoy seeing what they learned while making the project from what they thought went well to what they would do differently if they did a similar project in the future. I like to see at the grand champion projects because I know all the hard work that went into making them, but I also know that you can learn even more from the project that received a white ribbon than the one that was grand. In many ways having a garden and working with plants is similar to the youth making their 4-H or FFA projects. I've learned far more from the times I struggled to get something to grow than the years the garden essentially just grew itself.

When I first started gardening in North Dakota I thought I knew what I was doing and the first year I decided I was going to start all my plants from seed. Never mind that I had never actually started my own seeds and I was in a brand-new location I thought I had things pretty well figured out. I mean how hard could it be, right? My seedlings that year taught me that for all I thought I knew I had a long way to go. Everything that could go wrong starting seeds, did from letting them get too dry to having them stretch because they were too far from the light, then when I finally did get them outside, they all burnt to a crisp and died because I hadn't transitioned them properly. That spring was a white ribbon year for my first gardening season in North Dakota and I ended up buying the plants I had planned to start. Even though I struggled, I learned more about starting seeds that year from my failures than I have with my successes. I learned what I did wrong, but I also learned how to troubleshoot what had happened and several ways to fix those issues I was seeing. The lessons learned from those poor dead seedlings have served me well over the last few years and made me a better gardener despite the frustration I felt at the time.



My first growing season in Kansas has been a learning experience and has brought its own unique challenges from the shift in growing season to the weather. I apparently didn't learn all my lessons from my seed starting fiasco and started my tomatoes way too early this season. That led to some creative thinking trying to keep them growing without having them get too big. This summer I'm also switching my garden completely to a true no-till system rather than using weed mat as I've done in the past. So far I've had pretty good success keeping my weeds down using cardboard and adding grass clippings on top of it but the season is still young. My biggest success, literally, has been a variety of tomato called "Super Sauce" (picture on left) that I decided to give one a try here in Kansas. In the past the tomatoes have gotten huge but they barely ripened in North Dakota so I figured this variety would love the heat and longer season here in Kansas. They have outperformed my expectations but we are still a long way from ripe tomatoes. So far it's been a blue ribbon growing season but we have a long way to go before frost.

As gardeners every year is different and unique in some way. Despite our best laid plans, mother nature always loves to throw a wrench in somehow. The trick is to take those challenges and learn from them rather than letting yourself get discouraged and give up. Throughout my years gardening and working with houseplants I have found there is always a lesson to be learned and a new trick to managing a problem that I didn't know before. As the county fair starts this week, I hope you will join me at the fair, talk to the kids, and learn about their projects. Some kids will talk your ear off while others will barely answer your questions, but either way there is always a story to hear and something to learn. I look forward to learning about your gardening season and the lessons you have learned along the way. Feel free to send me updates, pictures, and any problems you might be having. Happy growing everyone!!

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Pollinator Plant of the Week-



This week's Pollinator of the week is Purple Coneflower. This beautiful plant is a native of the Kansas prairies and can often be seen blooming throughout pastures, in roadside ditches, in rocky areas and as a perennial flower in yards. A member of the sunflower family it goes by the name *Echinacea angustifolia*. *Echinacea* is Greek for "hedgehog" which is in reference to the spiny centers of the flowers. The native plants bloom in mainly in June and July with purple to pale purple flowers with an orange/brown spiky center. After blooming the petals will fall off and the seed heads remain on the plant. Goldfinches are attracted the seed heads and can often be seen eating on them during the winter if they are left to stand. There are a wide variety of cultivated varieties that come in different sizes,

shapes, and colors of blooms. Some of the new cultivars are not as beneficial for pollinators, especially the ones that lack the orange/brown centers. Purple coneflower is highly adaptable to our area and is very tolerant of heat, drought, humidity, and poor soils. The roots of this plant can extend up to 8' in the ground which allows it to survive prolonged periods without rain. Native Americans would use the roots of purple coneflower to treat toothaches, sore throats, mumps, wounds and burns due to the pain reducing compounds they contained.

Insect of the Week-

This week's insect is not an insect but rather a mite. The two-spotted spider mite is a common pest of yard, garden and houseplants around the area. Spider mites are a type of arachnid and are related to spiders, ticks, and scorpions. These tiny mites feed on the sap of the leaves and needles of plants and cause bruising with their mouth parts as they feed. This feeding leads to a speckled appearance on the leaf of a plant and can eventually lead to the death of the plants if the infestation is severe enough. The picture on the right is an eggplant leaf that is showing signs of a heavy infestation. Spider mites prefer warm weather, and the population can quickly explode during periods of hot and dry weather with the mites maturing from an egg to an adult in as little as a week. Because of their size spider mites can often hide in plain sight until they have started causing visible damage to the plants they have infested. The mites will often form webs on the bottom of leaves or



where the leaves connect to the stem, and this is often the first sign something is wrong. You can also check for spider mites by holding a piece of white paper under the leaf and tapping on the leaf. If there are small mobile specks you likely have spider mites. Treatment of spider mites can be difficult as many common insecticides have little effect on the mite but will kill the natural predators that are helping keep the population under control. This can lead to an explosion in the population rather than reducing the population. There are many beneficial insects that feed on spider mites including small lady beetles, predatory mites, and minute pirate bugs. You can often purchase beneficial predators for spider mites as an organic option to help control the populations. Other non-chemical ways to reduce the population include spraying the plants periodically with streams of water and watering often to prevent drought stress which can lead to an increased population and damage. There are some chemical options if needed including those with the active ingredients bifenthrin or acephate offer some control of spider mites. Horticultural oils, specifically the summer version (not the dormant version as that should only be used during the dormant season), are probably the most effective option available to homeowners on controlling spider mites.



Reminders-

- Treat for Japanese Beetles if necessary.
- Time to start seeds for fall gardening.
- Now is the time to plant potatoes for the fall if you can find seed potatoes.
- Continue to pick bagworms off as you see them. Once bagworms reach 1-2" in length they are hard to control with a spray.

Upcoming Events

- July 14-18, 2022: Butler County Fair

Don't forget to stop by the Fairgrounds and check out all the 4-H and other exhibits at the Butler County Fair. Check out the Open class list and bring some of your projects or produce to exhibit at the fair this year!!!

- July 28th, 2022: Fall Gardening

Growing a garden doesn't just stop once the tomatoes and squash are planted in the spring. There are many crops that can be grown in the fall. Some vegetables such as broccoli, kale and carrots are actually better tasting if planted in the fall. Join us at the Augusta Community Garden to learn about planting a fall garden and get some tips on how to extend your gardening season later into the year. Class starts at 6:30.

- August 3, 2022: Landscaping for Wildlife

How you landscape your property and the plants you select can create a welcome invitation for wildlife to visit your property. Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent, will discuss basic landscaping concepts that will encourage wildlife to visit your yard. Learn about recommended native plant material to utilize, as well as key management techniques that will provide benefits to many different wildlife species. The KSRE Garden hour sessions are held via Zoom starting at noon. For more information or to register [click here](#).

- August 4, 2022: Turf and Ornamental's Field Day @ John Pair Research Center

The field day program is designed for all segments of the turf & ornamentals industry - lawn care, athletic fields, golf courses, landscape, nursery, and grounds maintenance. Included on the program are research presentations, problem diagnosis, commercial exhibitors, and equipment displays. There will be time to see current research, talk to the experts and get answers to your questions.

- August 6, 2022: John Pair Open House

For more than 50 years, the John C. Pair Horticultural Research Center in Haysville, KS has been studying trees, shrubs, flowers, turfgrass, fruits, vegetables -- and now even industrial hemp -- to see which varieties grow best in Kansas. Since 1971, K-State plant researchers at the Pair Center have looked for the greenest turf grasses, maple trees with the best fall color, the toughest evergreen trees, the most drought tolerant plants, and more in order to recommend the best plants to grow in the weather extremes of Southcentral Kansas. To provide the public a behind-the-scenes look at this research, the John C. Pair Horticultural Research Center will host a public Open House on Saturday, Aug. 6 from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

- August 20, 2022: Nature in your Neighborhood- An Urban Conservation Workshop

Pollinator habitat, clean water, and reduced use of chemicals, join us to learn how to work with the environment in your backyard and be a steward of your land. This workshop will cover a variety of topics from how to choose the best tree or plant for your location to composting and improving your backyard for our native pollinators and birds. Join the Butler County Master Gardeners, the Butler County Conservation District and K-State Research and Extension for Nature in Your Neighborhood, an environmental stewardship partnership. Call our office at 316-321-9660 to register to make a rain barrel. Rain barrels are limited to the first 25 to register. Cost is \$15 for the rain barrel, workshops are free.

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