The weather forecast for this week is positively beautiful when compared to last week’s cold weather. Unfortunately, while it is warmer outside, the forecast of rain does put a damper on being able to go outside and do anything in our garden. This makes next week the perfect time to do some prep work on our tools so you are ready when gardening season starts.

The first step with your tools is always to get them cleaned up. It’s best to remove the soil from your tools right after you are finished using them, but that isn’t always possible. Soap and water are an easy way to remove dirt from any tool. For stubborn dirt or dirt in small creases, use a wire brush or steel wool. If the tool is covered in sap you can use rubbing alcohol, mineral spirits, or a foaming bathroom cleanser.

The second step is to disinfect any tools to prevent the spread of diseases among your plants. Ideally, this step should be done after every use but that can be hard on tools. One of the easiest ways to clean your tools is by soaking them for 30 minutes in a diluted bleach solution containing 9 parts of water to 1 part of bleach. You can also wipe tools using 70 to 100% rubbing alcohol. Once the tools are clean and disinfected you can sharpen your shovels and pruning tools. Sharp tools make any task easier, especially pruning or digging with a shovel.

The final step with tools is to inspect the handles and sand down any rough spots to prevent splinters. Treat the wooden handles with linseed or mineral oil to keep the wood strong and help the tools last longer. If you do have tools that need replacing, now is the time to do it before the growing season starts. Happy growing everyone!!
Hazardous Trees

Trees are an important part of any landscape or yard. They offer many positive impacts including lowering cooling costs in the summer, increasing home values, and helping reduce the amount of pollution in the town. While trees have many positives, it’s important to regularly inspect your trees to ensure they don’t become a hazard. The winter storm we had a couple of weeks ago caused some damage to trees, especially in the El Dorado area including some that fell on people’s houses. This storm along with our spring thunderstorms are a prime example of why it is important to evaluate the health and structure of the trees in your yard and do some corrective pruning to hopefully prevent damage during storms.

A tree’s structural support is most important during high winds or when ice or snow builds up on the branches. Trees also need some flexibility, especially during stressful periods, due to the great physical strain placed on the tree by the weight of its branches and trunk. Since tree failures usually happen during wind, ice, or snow storms, it’s easy to think you can’t prevent tree failure however most tree failures are caused by chronic diseases or structural problems. These issues can be prevented while others, such as damage done by tornadoes cannot. While there is a myth that trees are only a hazard on stormy days, this is simply untrue. Trees can fail on a calm day at any time. Four main ways that living trees can become structurally unsound include internal decay in the trunk and large branches, cankers and canker-rots, cut roots or root decay, and weak forks between the trunk and large branches.

Internal Decay

Nearly all of the volume of a tree is wood (xylem). Most of the wood is composed of dead, supporting tissues while only the thin layer of tissues nearest the cambium are alive. Internal decay is caused by the activity of microorganisms which are usually fungi and/or bacteria. Most of these decay-causing microorganisms are “opportunistic” and enter the tree through wounds (this is why it’s important to prevent “mower blight” or hitting the tree trunk with your mower). The tricky part with internal decay is that the tree may look healthy and continue growing but it lacks the strength to keep itself upright during tough weather conditions. Once the decayed tissue invades a large volume of the trunk the tree is unable to support its weight. Internal decay is a slow process as the disease first enters through a wound and then works its way through the branch or the trunk. As the issue progresses the tree may have fewer or smaller leaves than normal, limbs may die back with no visible reason why, the tree may turn colors earlier than normal in the fall, or have an excessive amount of seeds. It’s easy to think that a mushroom, similar to the photo, would be the first sign there is an issue but often the fungus has fully invaded the tree and the fruiting body or mushroom is one of the last signs. Unfortunately, there is no treatment for bacterial or fungal rots once the tree has been infected.
Cankers
Cankers can be caused either by living organisms, including fungi and bacteria or by injuries such as excessive temperatures or hail. Many fungi that cause cankers normally inhabit the surface of the tree, gain entrance through natural or man-made wounds and only cause issues when the tree is under stress. However, some fungi aggressively attack trees and cause cankers. Cankers can be seen as localized dead areas on the bark. These areas are caused by the dead cambium, either from a disease or damage, and the tree is unable to close the wounds leading to the formation of the canker. Cankers weaken the structure of the tree because when a tree is healthy it can bend and sway with the wind. When a canker forms, the dead tissue has little flexibility and the tree often breaks at that location. Trees that have cankers can grow and be reasonably structurally sound for years, provided the canker isn’t on a large limb or the main trunk. There are canker diseases that can kill trees very quickly but most only cause localized damage.

Root Failure
This hazard is caused by anything that alters or compromises the structural support provided by any part of the root system and decreases the stability of the tree. Two of the biggest causes of root failure are root decay and severing portions of the tree roots but others include drought, soil erosion, adding extra soil over roots, gas leaks, flooding, and compaction. Similar to internal decay, the roots are infected through a wound and slowly die. Unfortunately, many root rots don’t kill the tree before they weaken it so a perfectly healthy-looking tree might collapse in a storm with little warning. One of the most common causes of damage to tree roots is construction with digging and heavy equipment causing damage to the root systems. Trees that have lost 50% of their root system to construction should be removed.

Weak Branches or Forks
When tree branch angles are less than 40 degrees we refer to them as weak angles. In these forks, not much-supporting wood will develop on the inside of the angle because of the pressure exerted by both sides. As the branch continues to grow and the weight increases the weak fork will often split at that junction. Several tree species are prone to weak branch angles including Callery Pear, Lacebark Elms, and Siberian Elms among others. Early training or pruning of trees is vital to promoting strong branch angles and reducing the chance of failure. The branch on the far right shows an ideal branch angle while the tree closer shows a weak or tight angle.

Winter is the perfect time to take a look at the trees in your yard as with the leaves off of the trees it is easier to see branches that are dead, damage to the trunk, or locations with cankers or mushrooms growing on them. If you have concerns contact a certified arborist to come and inspect your tree to determine if it is hazardous or not. For larger trees, I always recommend contacting a professional to either prune or remove those trees for everyone’s safety.
Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:
February 7\textsuperscript{th} - Gardening for a Changing Climate
March 6\textsuperscript{th} - Selecting and Planting Fruit Trees
April 3\textsuperscript{rd} - Companion Plants in the Garden
May 1\textsuperscript{st} - Understanding Water Sources for the Garden

Upcoming Classes:
January 24\textsuperscript{th} at 7 pm - Starting a New Landscape, Extension Office, El Dorado
February 10\textsuperscript{th} at 10 am - Preparing for the Growing Season, Andover Public Library
February 22\textsuperscript{nd} at 6 pm - Starting Seeds, Augusta Public Library
February 27\textsuperscript{th} at 6 pm - Preparing for the Growing Season, Bradford Memorial Library, El Dorado

Lettuce Bowls
Growing your own salad greens can provide a source of fresh, leafy vegetables with the added benefit of being able to try varieties that may not be available at local markets. When growing leafy greens, the first crop can often be harvested in just a few short weeks. In addition to salads, young leafy greens make flavorful and nutritious additions to sandwiches or wraps.

Supplies:
- Container 18” across and 6 to 12” deep
- Potting soil
- Sunny window or grow light
- Leaf lettuce seeds

Directions
1. Fill the container with potting soil, leaving an inch of space between the top of the soil and the top of the pot.
2. Thoroughly moisten the potting soil in the container.
3. Sprinkle the seeds over the soil. Try to leave a ½” spacing on the seeds.
4. Add ¼” of potting soil over the top of the seeds.
5. Water in well.
6. Place in a sunny window or under a grow light.
7. Fertilize at half strength once seeds are 4 to 6” tall and every two weeks afterward.
8. You can start harvesting the greens when they are 4 to 6” tall. Leave an inch of growth on any plant you harvest.
9. Greens will continue to regrow and can be harvested again several times.
LAWN & LANDSCAPE CARE
FOR NEW HOMEBUYERS

Buying a home can be overwhelming and that is without factoring in that you now have a yard to care for. While we can’t help with the house maintenance we can help you figure out what to do outside of the house. This class is designed to help you figure out the basics of lawn and landscape care, determine what plants are currently growing around your home, and how to maintain them or create a whole new landscape. This program is free of charge.

TOPICS
- Basic Lawn Care
- Low Maintenance Lawn Care
- Basic Landscape Design
- Plant Identification
- Resources for picking out plants

TUESDAY,
JANUARY 24, 2024
7:00 P.M.

BUTLER COUNTY
COMMUNITY/4-H BUILDING
200 North Griffith Street
El Dorado, KS 67042

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PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE:
5 ECO-FRIENDLY GARDENING EVENTS

GARDEN MAGIC UNVEILED
Feb. 10th, 10–11:30am

SPECIAL STORY TIME, SEED BOMBS
March 12th, 10:30am

SEED EXCHANGE
March 12th, 5:30–7:00pm

PLANT EXCHANGE EVENT
May 16th, 5:30–7:00pm

FREE FOR ALL AGES!
To register, please email: tlarsen@andoverlibrary.org

EARTH DAY VIDEO CONTEST
Submission April 19th
Screening: April 26th, 6pm