

K-STATE

Research and Extension

Butler County

May 5th, 2025

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The Grapevine

Planting Warm-Season Vegetables

Soil temperatures are rising in Butler County, with the current soil temperatures on May 5th, as I write this, sitting at 57 degrees at two and four inches. Over the last week, the soil temperatures have averaged 61 degrees. That means it's finally time to plant warm-season vegetables in our gardens. Tomatoes can be transplanted when the soil temperature is 55 degrees F. For peppers, cucumbers, melons, and squash, the soil should be at least 60 degrees. Our soil temperature is high enough now that it is safe to plant most warm-season crops.

Most of our warm-season vegetables can be planted in early May; however, winter squash and pumpkins should be delayed until mid to late June. The first generation of squash bugs is active in July. Delaying the planting date for squash will result in younger plants that can escape this round of squash bug damage. Plants will need protection from the second generation of squash bugs, which is present in August.

Wind is an important environmental feature for the plant world. Many plants rely on the wind to disperse seeds and transfer pollen from one plant to another. Young plants strengthen their stems as a result of nudging from the wind. As you move seedlings into the garden, remember to harden them off by exposing them to the elements gradually. Without preparing the plants for the wind through increased exposure, they are more susceptible to breaking under this force. In small-scale gardens, you can also create a wind break to further protect young transplants from the wind, but this is not practical on a large scale. Happy Growing!!





Growing Beautiful Annuals

Annual flowers are unmatched in their ability to provide a plethora of blooms throughout the growing season. No matter what color, size, or shape of flower you want, there is likely an annual that will fit your needs. Annuals are plants that sprout, grow, flower, and set seed all in one growing season. Some plants we consider annuals are perennials in other locations, but that's a conversation for another time. Growing annuals can be frustrating for some, but with a few tips, you can have beautiful blooms all summer.

The first key is to pick the right plant for the correct location.

No matter your care, a sun-loving plant will never be happy or perform well in a full shade location. Be sure to check the tag to see what the growing requirements are for the plant before you buy it. It's also important to check how much water the plants need before planting them in combination. Try not to plant water-loving annuals with plants that prefer to stay dry. You will never make both happy, and you won't be satisfied with the look. Check the tag for how big the plants will be when they are mature. Plants crowded too close together don't perform well; they compete for nutrients and can get stretched looking due to a lack of space. When planting in the ground, always follow the spacing requirements to ensure the plants have the room to spread out.

The second tip is to encourage bushy plants. Annuals can become leggy and slow down on blooming if not trimmed, especially right when they are first planted. While removing flowers when planting annuals might seem harsh, it's important to encourage them to develop a root system and branch out so you have a larger, healthier plant later. Another key to keeping annuals blooming is to deadhead the flowers. Some annuals no longer need deadheading, such as petunias; however, they will bloom better if spent flowers are removed. Always use scissors to cut the old flowers off instead of pulling them.

The third tip is to fertilize. Annuals are heavy feeders and need fertilizer throughout the growing season to keep up with the growth and blooms they produce. Plants in the ground should be fertilized every 4-6 weeks through the growing season with a general-purpose fertilizer. In contrast, pot plants should be fertilized weekly with a water-soluble fertilizer. I will also include some slow-release fertilizer mixed in with the soil in my pots to provide fertilizer for every watering. Along with fertilizer, be sure the flowers are getting watered regularly and don't allow them to dry out for too long, as this will reduce the bloom time. Some plants we consider annuals, such as geraniums, hibiscus, and mandevilla, can be brought inside as houseplants to be moved back outdoors the following year. Just make sure to treat for bugs before bringing them inside.



Annuals can provide season-long blooms and color for the garden if they have the care they need to thrive. Many annuals are wonderful for pollinators and can help fill in the times of the year when your perennial flowers aren't blooming. Try mixing them in flowerbeds, using them in patio pots, or even in the garden to attract pollinators to your yard and gardens. You can have beautiful blooms all season long with just a few simple steps.

Question of the Week- Keeping up with Weeds

The rain over the last few weeks has been welcomed after our dry years; however, all that water has kept me out of the garden, and the weeds are taking advantage. It's unfortunate that all of our in-ground gardens have a weed seed bank in the soil that we have to deal with, and once you get behind in weeding the garden, it can seem almost impossible to catch up. While the long-range forecast calls for a drier pattern to set up after this week, here are some tips to help stay ahead of the weeds for the summer.

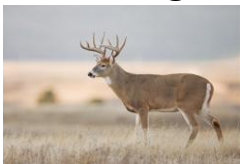


- **Weeds vs. Crops-** One of the best steps to keep your garden weed-free is to provide an environment that favors the vegetables over the weeds. Plant your vegetables at the ideal times, fertilize the vegetables as needed so they grow vigorously and outcompete weeds, use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to only water the vegetables, and don't water between rows.
- **Cover the soil-** The less soil surface that sees the sun, the fewer weeds you will have. Several options are available to cover your soil from grass clippings (make sure you haven't applied weed killer) to cardboard boxes flattened to weed mat; it all depends on your preference and how much you want to spend. This summer, I plan to use cardboard boxes as the base layer, then cover the cardboard with lawn clippings, leaves, and other composted materials to form a layer 4-5" thick to keep the soil constantly covered. Even if you don't cover the soil around the plants, try to cover the pathways and open spaces between the rows.
- **Use cover crops-** Cover crops are an excellent way to suppress weeds between plants, reduce compaction, and add nutrients to the soil. You can plant cover crops in the spring to suppress summer weeds or in the fall after the garden has come out to keep winter weeds from growing. Some common cover crops include winter wheat, annual rye grass, clovers, vetches, peas, soybeans, and buckwheat. I also liked to mix in radishes or a root crop to help break up compacted soil.
- **Use mechanical means-** If possible, it's best to hoe, pull, or control weeds when they are small, but they aren't the only mechanical method of controlling weeds. If you are feeling brave, using a flame weeder is an option (although I would avoid it if the weather turns dry) to control various weeds. One of my friends is trying a solar-powered weeding robot for her commercial vegetable garden. So far, she has had great success with her robot keeping up with the weeds.

Weeds can be a common issue in vegetable gardens and flowerbeds, but there are ways we can keep ahead of them and reduce the aggravation that they can cause. Take a few minutes while it's early in the growing season to use some of the above techniques to reduce the amount of weeds you have this year.

Video of the Week

Protecting an Orchard from Deer



Deer can do a lot of damage to young fruit trees. In this area, we've had many problems with deer and young fruit trees. They'll do one of two things. They'll either eat all the leaves as they come out in the spring, or they'll use them for rubs in the fall. Either way, they can destroy a fruit tree. This segment demonstrates an easy and inexpensive way to protect those trees. To watch the video, check out the [Kansas Healthy Yards website](#).

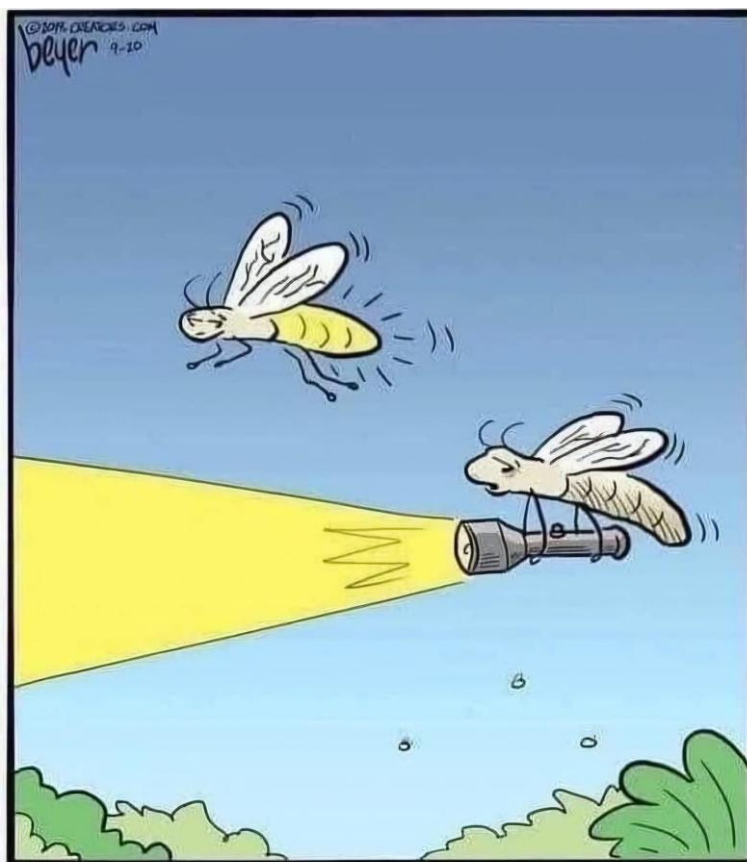
Insect of the Week- Bronze Cutworm



Photo credit: Wayne Jelinek

Bronze cutworms have been found in Butler County. These cutworms are typically a problem in turf but can also impact other species. Cutworms overwinter as eggs, larvae, or pupae, depending on the species, and damage to turf will typically occur in May. Larvae feed on the leaves and crown at night and may cut off plants near the soil line. Look for cut-off seedlings and dig around the base of the plant to expose the caterpillars. During the day, they hide in holes, under debris, or under thatch near the soil's surface, on the leaves and crown at night.

An infestation in turf can be detected by applying irritants such as dish detergent. Add one-quarter cup of dry or one ounce of liquid detergent to one gallon of water in a sprinkling can and apply the solution to one square yard of turfgrass where an infestation is suspected. The caterpillars will surface within 10 minutes of soaking and can be found by separating the blades of grass. Turf should be treated if five or more cutworms are found per square yard. If the cutworms are in the garden, there are preventative measures you can use. To prevent damage from surface cutworms, wrap seedlings and transplants with cardboard collars to protect them from cutworm damage. A simple collar can be made from a paper cup with the bottom removed. Push the cup into the soil to hold it in place. Cardboard tubes from paper towels or toilet tissue can be cut to size for collars. Standard treatment options include products with the active ingredients of Bt, Spinosad, permethrin, carbaryl, or bifenthrin.



"When you get to be my age, things don't work like they used to."

Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:
May 7th- Methods to Increase Vegetable Yield

June 4th- Native and Ornamental Grasses for Kansas

July 2nd- Cutting Edge Efforts in Kansas Demo Gardens

Upcoming Events:

May 8th at 5:30 pm
Plant Swap at the Andover Library

May 14th at 6 pm
Attracting Pollinators to the Garden at the Bradford Memorial Library

May 21st at 5:30 pm
Gardening with Pollinators at Benton Community Building

June 18th at 5:30 pm
Troubleshooting Issues in the Garden at Benton Community Building

Pasta and Kale Salad

Kale is a popular springtime vegetable that is very tolerant of cold temperatures and sometimes overwinters in our area. This pasta and kale salad is light but filling and perfect for a springtime lunch.



Ingredients

- 4 cups raw kale, shredded
- 1/4 cup Ranch salad dressing
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- 1 tomato, diced
- 1/3 cup crumbled feta cheese or other shredded cheese
- 1 cup dry pasta (shell, elbow macaroni, rotini, orzo), cooked according to package

Directions

1. Toss kale with salad dressing and lemon juice.
2. Massage kale well with hands for about 2 minutes. It's OK to squeeze!
3. Allow kale to sit for an hour in the refrigerator.
4. Toss the other ingredients with the kale and serve.

Recipe Source: [Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities Extension](#)



Plant Swap

Thursday, May 8th

5:30PM-7PM
in the Art Gallery

Do you have extra garden plants or houseplants? Do you need more variety in your garden? Come to the Plant Swap and trade plants with other gardeners and plant lovers. Gardeners of all skill levels and ages are welcome to join!

Calla Edwards and Master Gardeners will lead the event.



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