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Research and Extension
Butler County

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In this Issue:

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The Grapevine

Sidedressing Annuals and Vegetables

Nitrogen is an essential plant nutrient in the metabolism of vegetable crops and annual flowers. Most annuals and vegetables are fast-growing plants with lush vegetation and high nitrogen needs. Home gardens can be a hodgepodge of soil fertility depending on previous fertilization, the type of soil, and what was grown there. A few gardeners will over-fertilize their gardens, a few get it about right, and most actually underfertilize their gardens. They may put a good general fertilizer down and side-dress vegetables and flowers at planting time. Still, they never fertilize the garden again, which can compromise the growth and productivity of their plants. Coupled with the fast development of plants and the extreme mobility of nitrogen, it is necessary to split the applications of the nutrients on most vegetable crops. This is known as sidedressing because we apply a nitrogen fertilizer alongside the row. Without a recent soil test, we recommend a fertilizer application 3 to 4 weeks into the growing season. That is 3 to 4 weeks after seeded crops emerge for transplants, or that can also be 3 to 4 weeks after transplanting. This is a general rule of thumb; however, there are some vegetables that we need to be careful about when we apply the next round of nitrogen. Below are more specific recommendations.

- Bell peppers and eggplants – at first fruit set.
- Tomatoes (two side dressings) – at first fruit set and every three to four weeks after.
- Cucumbers, cantaloupes, watermelons, and squash – when vines begin to run, then every three to four weeks after.
- Okra– at first fruit set and every four to six weeks after.
- Sweet corn – when corn is 1 foot tall, and again when it is 3 feet tall.
- Annual flowers should be fertilized approximately once a month to encourage blooming and growth throughout the season.
- Peas and beans should not be sidedressed.

Xeriscaping: a water-wise approach to landscaping

While conserving water might not be on our minds right now with all the rain we have been having, now is the time to look at our gardens and watering practices to make changes before the next drought comes. With the dry conditions that have persisted in the area starting from the fall of 2021 and running through the beginning of this year, there has been an increased interest in alternative lawn and landscaping practices both in the area and across the country. These collective practices are "xeriscaping," coined by a group in Colorado to describe landscaping where water conservation is the primary focus. Whatever you choose to do in your lawn, make sure it follows all city codes and requirements.

Xeriscaping was coined from the Greek word "xeros," meaning dry, and scape, which means the pattern of landscape. A well-planned xeriscape will result in an attractive, sustainable landscape that conserves water and is based on sound horticultural principles. There are many ways to develop and create a water-wise landscape, from reducing the lawn area to auditing your watering practices, using mulch to cover the ground, and planting plants that tolerate heat and drought conditions. The first step to creating a water-wise lawn is to start with a plan that balances your aesthetic needs and your desire to conserve resources.

One of the most significant aspects of xeriscaping is reducing the amount of irrigated turf in your yard through a couple of options. Xeriscaping doesn't mean you remove all turf from your yard; it's just that you think out the remaining areas and remove hard-to-irrigate locations and tight corners that are hard to mow. The first option is to convert turf areas into alternatives requiring less water. Keep the lawn grass in functional areas, including spots with fair amounts of traffic or areas for pets and children to play. Transition steep slopes that are harder to water to groundcovers instead of turf. The second option is to transition the lawn to a grass option, such as buffalograss or bermudagrass, that requires less moisture than the traditional bluegrass or fescue yard. Turfgrass has its benefits in a water-wise landscape, including reducing run-off and environmental pollution while also moderating the temperature in the area. Just watch your watering and limit it to when it's necessary.

Auditing your watering practices can make a big difference in your water, as proper irrigation can reduce water usage by 30-80%. Consider transitioning to soaker hoses or drip irrigation in flower beds to only water the areas necessary, rather than sprinklers. If you use a sprinkler system, ensure your system adequately covers the desired location and adjust if necessary. Change your irrigation system from watering everything to just watering in zones, as some areas of the yard won't need as much water as others. Remember to water deeply and infrequently rather than shallow watering. Trees and shrubs should be watered to a depth of 12-18" while lawns should be watered to a depth of 6-8" each time.

In any landscaping, cover as much of the ground as possible with some mulch to reduce evaporation and help keep the soil temperature cooler. If you need to improve your soil, consider using an organic mulch such as bark chips or shredded mulch to add organic material to the soil. Rock and inorganic mulches will also work in most options. You will ultimately need to choose what works for you and is readily available. These are simply the first steps to being water-wise in your home landscape, and many can be done without any changes to your current landscaping. Happy Growing!

Insect of the Week- Japanese Beetles

These imported beetles originated in Japan (hence the name), where they were only minor pests in their environment. Unfortunately, in the US, they are one of the most destructive pests of lawns, gardens, and ornamental plants that gardeners deal with. These beetles have a one-year life cycle with the adults hatching in May and laying eggs in July. Adults are less than ½" long, with a metallic green head and a bronze-colored body. The larvae or grub form is white and shaped like a "C". The grubs feed on the roots of grasses underground during the fall before burrowing deeper in the soil to overwinter. They eventually pupate in late spring before hatching into adults. The adults are equal opportunity feeders but prefer roses, maple trees, grapes, elms, and crabapples.

Most healthy plants can withstand a small number of Japanese beetles, so general watering and fertilizing will help reduce the impact; however, younger plants or vegetable crops can be quickly desiccated if numbers become too high (Like the grapevine in the picture, Photo courtesy of Nancy Gordon). If you have a small number of beetles on your plants, you can pick them off and throw them into a bucket of soapy water. Larger populations of beetles may require some chemical treatment. Neem Oil is an organic option; however, it only discourages the beetles from eating the plant and needs to be reapplied frequently. Spinosad is another organic option that kills the adults, but again, it needs to be reapplied frequently. Products containing permethrin, pyrethrin, or carbaryl will all provide a couple of weeks' control but must be reapplied. Any spraying should be done early in the morning or late in the evening to prevent harm to pollinators. Traps are not recommended as they attract more insects than enter the traps and can worsen feeding in the area rather than help control the issue.

Grubs are a significant issue in some lawns. Most grasses can tolerate up to 10 grubs per square foot; however, any number above that will cause dieback and browning of the grass. In heavily infested lawns, the grass can be peeled up like a carpet due to grub feeding or torn up by wildlife searching for the grubs. Control of the grubs should begin soon after they start to hatch in the late summer. Preventative herbicides can be applied up to four weeks before the eggs hatch, and various chemical options are available. A biological option called Milky Spore Disease has shown limited effectiveness against high populations and can take a while to establish. Still, it only impacts Japanese Beetles and is an organic option. For more information on Japanese Beetles, check out this publication: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3488.pdf

Video of the Week

Rabbit, Mole, and Deer Mitigation

The presence of wildlife such as rabbits and deer can pose many potential problems for home gardeners, depending mainly on which plants have been chosen for a landscape. Learn about the plants best suited for avoiding these issues and other nuisance animal mitigation techniques. Watch the video on the K-State Research and Extension Garden Hour Website.

Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:

July 2nd- Cutting Edge Efforts in Kansas Demo Gardens

August 6th- Innovations in Horticultural Research at Kansas State University

September 3rd- Shrubs that Thrive in Kansas

Upcoming Events:

July 9th at 12:15 pm- Troubleshooting Issues in the Garden Lunch and Learn at Andover Library

July 9th at 5:30 pm- Fall Gardening at the Benton Community Building

July 13th from 10-2 pm- Produce Fest at the El Dorado Farmer's Market

July 16th at 6 pm- Annual and Perennial Plants for Kansas at the Bradford Memorial Library

Tataki-zome or Flower Pounding

Photo Credit: Brie Passano

Tataki-zomé is known as 'flower pounding' or 'plant bashing.' This process uses plants to create a print on material like fabric or thick paper. It has been used by artists from Japan for many years and is now something artists worldwide have explored in their own ways. Tataki is the Japanese word for hammering, and zomé is the word for dye. Some people also call this hapa-zome, which means plant dye.

With this process, you are using the colours in plants themselves to dye the materials by hammering, so you are bashing the colour out of the plants onto the fabric or paper. It's an excellent process to experiment with, and when you pull back the paper or cloth to see what you've made, there's an exciting reveal.

Materials Needed:

- Watercolor paper
- Fresh flowers or plants (Flowers with brighter or darker pigments will show up better on the paper.)
- Hammer
- Waxed paper or paper towel
- Picture frame

Instructions

1. Cut the flowers off at the base so it is flat. Arrange flowers on the paper face down in the pattern you want the final drawing to be in.
2. Cover the arrangement with wax paper or a towel. The wax paper keeps the flowers in place and the pigment from getting on the hammer.
3. Use a hammer to pound around the circumference of the flower, applying pressure to the petals. Avoid putting pressure on the center of the flower; otherwise, pollen and moisture will stick to the paper as well, which doesn't look as pretty. Repeat this process until you're happy with how the hammered flower art looks.
4. When hammering the flowers, carefully remove the wax paper and flowers from the watercolor paper. Set the paper in a cool, dry area. Make sure it's flat, then let it dry completely. Once dry, add the flower print to a frame.

LUNCH & LEARN

Bring your lunch and join Horticulture Agent, Calla Edwards, over the lunch hour during our monthly Lunch & Learn Program. This will be held over the lunch hour and will cover a variety of horticulture topics.

July 9th

12:15-12:45 p.m.

Andover Public Library
1511 E. Central Ave.
Andover, KS

July Topic: Troubleshooting Issues in the Garden

Learn how to identify and treat common vegetable garden issues.