

**February 16th, 2026**

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# The Grapevine

## Peach Leaf Curl

While we most commonly think of pruning peaches during the wintertime, it's also important to treat for a springtime disease of peaches and nectarines called peach leaf curl. This disease is caused by a fungus that overwinters on the tree's bark and causes problems in wet springs after mild winters.

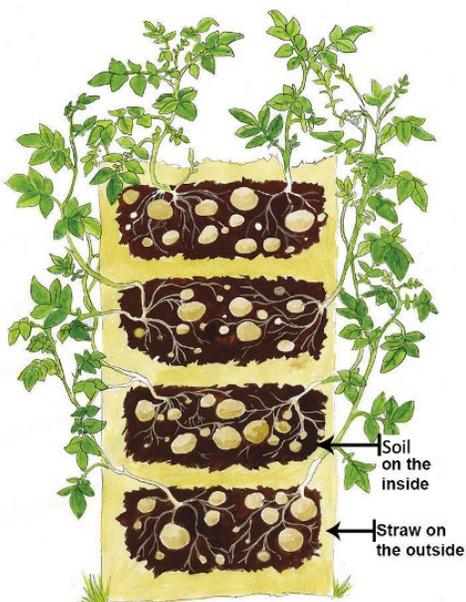
Symptoms of peach leaf curl appear as developing leaves become severely distorted (thickened and puckered) and develop a reddish or purple color. Later, the disease forms spores on the leaves, giving them a silvery cast before the leaves fall off. This defoliation slowly weakens the tree over a period of years. This disease has only one cycle per year and overwinters on the tree before infecting the leaves the following year. Once symptoms have occurred, we have passed the window for treatment, and nothing can be done for that year. The best time to spray for peach leaf curl is in the spring after pruning, but before the buds swell with warmer weather.

This disease is easy to treat with a single fungicide spray of a product with the active ingredients copper or chlorothalonil, thoroughly covering the entire tree before bud break. This will kill the spores and control any infection. Pick a warm day with

temperatures above 50 degrees for several hours. If peach leaf curl does occur and cause significant defoliation in the spring, be sure to thin the fruit on infected trees to reduce the stress on the trees. Happy Growing!



## Growing Potatoes in Towers



Have you been looking for something new to try this spring? Do you enjoy those fresh-from-the-garden delights, but struggle to incorporate them into your meals? Potatoes are a relatively easy-to-grow crop that the whole family can enjoy, and can be grown vertically in your smallest spaces. Traditional potato plantings require long rows of mounded soil from which the plants grow. This can be a hard-growing method for older gardeners, those with mobility issues, or gardeners who live in apartments. Growing potatoes in towers takes those long rows and stacks them, resulting in a much more productive use of space and an eye-catching garden feature. First, a reminder on how to cut potatoes. Before planting, seed potatoes can be cut into sections, each with one to two eyes. Generally, I try to end up with at least one-inch cubes of flesh with the eye(s). These sections are then left to set for 24-48 hours to allow the cuts to heal. This prevents the sections from rotting once planted. If your seed potatoes are very

small, you can leave them whole and plant them directly.

For potato towers, you can either buy pre-built towers or build ones yourself. To build the towers, use four-foot lengths of rolled fencing wire or concrete wire shaped into tubes and fastened with wire. Place the tower in a sunny location with well-draining soil near a water source. Once you've decided where you want to grow for the season, place the cages and stake them down with landscape staples. You can also use rebar, bricks, or anything else you have around the garden to weight down your cages. To fill the tower, you will need straw or mulch and either raised bed soil or general potting soil. As a reminder, don't use soil from your garden in this container. Layer the tower with 4-6 inches of straw, then 4-6 inches of soil. Place the seed potatoes about every 5 to 6 inches along the outside edge of the tower, and water-in. Add another 4-6 inches of soil to cover the potatoes, and repeat the process beginning with straw. Be sure to incorporate a general-purpose fertilizer in the soil as you plant every layer.

Most potato varieties will do well in this type of growing condition. Potatoes grown in pots will typically be smaller than those grown in the ground, but they will still be productive. Consistent moisture is vital. Ensure the soil remains moist but not waterlogged. The tower's design promotes adequate drainage, reducing the risk of root rot. Remember to fertilize regularly, as the amount of growing media for the potatoes is relatively small. Incorporate a balanced, low-nitrogen fertilizer, such as 5-10-10, into the soil at planting. Reapply lightly midway through the growing season to support tuber development. Once the foliage begins to yellow and die back, typically after 10-12 weeks for early varieties, it's time to harvest. Carefully dismantle the tower, allowing the soil to fall away and revealing the potatoes for easy collection.

Growing potatoes in containers or towers is an excellent alternative for gardeners with limited space, in apartments, or those who struggle to grow potatoes in the ground. Remember to keep the potatoes' moisture and fertilizer needs met, and you can have an excellent harvest this season. As a reminder, potatoes are typically planted in mid to late March. Be sure to buy certified disease-free potatoes rather than using leftover grocery store potatoes. For tips on cutting potatoes before planting, check out our video on [Seed Potato Preparation](#). For additional information on how to grow potatoes, check out the [KSE Irish Potato](#) publication.



## Question of the Week- Using Wound Sealant on Trees



This question was asked by a homeowner who had to have a large portion of her Maple tree removed because it had become infected and died. She was hoping to save the rest of the tree after removing the dead portion. Her neighbor had recommended she seal the cut with something to protect the tree. In decades past, recommendations were often made to apply tree paint to wounds; in fact, I remember my parents recommending that to people when they owned their garden center. The idea was that this paint would prevent decay, help speed healing, and improve the appearance of the cut. Although these claims have been debunked for years, many tree wound-

dressing products are still available online or at garden supply stores. Many of them are petroleum-based and advertised as being waterproof and flexible to keep insects and fungi from invading the pruned areas.

In reality, pruning paint may impede healing and encourage the growth of rot organisms and insect infestation. Rather than preventing infection, wound dressings often trap moisture, which can promote decay. In most cases, it is best to let wounds heal on their own. Over millennia, trees have developed effective mechanisms for this. A properly pruned tree or shrub will seal off wounds and prevent decay organisms from entering the trunk. Naturally, minor wounds heal much faster than major ones, making a clear case for pruning and training plants when they are young. If the wound in the tree was caused by damage from a storm, the best thing you can do for that tree is to make the wound as clean and smooth as possible to reduce the surface area that rot or insects could enter. If your tree has a big hole in it, don't try to fill it with any of the recommendations you might find online, such as cement or spray foam. Neither of these materials will bond to the tree's wood, and they will retain moisture, accelerate the development of wood-decay fungi, and disrupt the tree's natural compartmentalization.

## Insect of the Week- Scout for Scale Insects

The dormant season is a good time to check woody plants for scale insect infestations. This time of year, deciduous plants lack leaves, making scale more easily visible. If an infestation is detected, plan to apply dormant oil for control by March 1. Be sure the temperature is 40 degrees or above before spraying. Scale insects are easily overlooked because they are small and immobile most of their lives, and they do not resemble most other insects. Many of them resemble small oval or circular shells, but some have more unusual shapes, like oyster shells. Coloring varies, but can include white, tan, and brown. Plants that should be inspected for scales include apples, pears, other fruit trees, bush fruits, lilac, crabapple, oak, ash, elm, maple, linden, arborvitae, juniper, pine, spruce, and yew. Manhattan euonymus, a broadleaf evergreen, is especially prone to scale problems. Plants are not harmed if only a few scales are present. But the scale population can increase dramatically during the growing season. Heavy infestations of scale insects can damage fruit crops, destroy branches, and kill entire plants.



## Upcoming Events

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### Garden Hour Webinars:

March 4<sup>th</sup>- Naturalistic Landscape Design Style

April 1<sup>st</sup>- April Showers, Rain Garden Flowers

May 6<sup>th</sup>- Natives vs. Cultivars--Making Informed Choices for Your Landscape

### Upcoming Events:

March 7<sup>th</sup>- Seed Swap at First Baptist Church in Augusta

March 11<sup>th</sup> at 12:15 pm- Seed Starting Lunch and Learn at Andover Public Library

March 11<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 pm- Companion Vegetable Planting at Benton Community Building

March 26<sup>th</sup>-Simple Morea Classes on Kokedama and Planted Wall Hanging

## Potato Nachos



Potatoes, cheese, and delicious veggies? Umm... yes, please! Perfect for your next get-together or for enjoying at home.

### Ingredients

- 3 large russet potatoes
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- 1 cup black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- 1 jalapeno pepper (or to taste)
- ¼ cup diced red onion
- 5 green onions
- ½ cup finely chopped tomato
- Optional toppings: salsa, guacamole, or sour cream

### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Spray a large baking pan with non-stick cooking spray or line it with parchment paper.
2. Wash and pat dry potatoes using a paper towel. Slice into ¼-inch thick rounds.
3. Add potatoes to a large mixing bowl and add oil, paprika, salt, pepper, garlic powder, and onion powder.
4. Bake for 20 minutes, then turn over the potato rounds and bake for another 20 minutes.
5. Add beans and cheese and cook for an additional 5 minutes or until the cheese is melted.
6. Add the rest of the toppings.
7. If desired, serve with salsa, guacamole, and/or sour cream.

**Recipe Source:** [North Dakota State University Extension](#)

# Free Gardening Classes

## Benton Community Center

With Calla Edwards  
K-State Research & Extension Horticulture Agent

### Classes:

**Seed Starting** on February 11th  
**Companion Planting** on March 11th  
**Myths and Misconceptions** on April 8th  
**Container Veggies** on May 13th  
**Landscape Design** on June 10th  
**Composting** on July 15<sup>th</sup>  
**\*\*\*5:30 PM\*\*\***



### **Naturalistic Landscape Design Style: Kansas Perspectives & Flexible Approaches for Every Garden**

Wednesday, March 4th 12:00PM -1:00PM CST

Learn how Kansans perceive and implement a naturalistic landscape design style. Join Dr. Cheryl Boyer, Horticulture Extension Specialist, as she highlights flexible approaches to blending native and modern plants, applying landscape design principles that work for any size garden. Gain inspiration and actionable ideas for overcoming the common challenges of creating resilient, beautiful, naturalistic landscapes.



Register Here!

Please register for this free Zoom Webinar at:  
[ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour](https://ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour)

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