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The Grapevine

Planting Asparagus

Asparagus is a popular perennial vegetable throughout Kansas. It is generally the first fresh vegetable harvest of spring, making a welcome addition to the garden. If you plan to start a new asparagus bed, it should be planted from March 15th to April 15th, so if you plan to plant it this spring, it's time to get started. In reality, we probably should have started preparing the planting area in the fall by killing any weeds or foliage growing there, but we can still be successful. Now that the soil has thawed, it is the perfect time to prepare the site. Before tilling, add compost, rotted manure, or another good organic material to the bed, along with 4 to 5 pounds of a 5-10-5 fertilizer per 1000 square feet. Till all the amendments into the soil and work them in well.

Asparagus will come as one-year-old crowns that you will plant in a trench as wide as your garden spade and approximately 8 inches deep. If you intend to plant more than one row, space the trenches approximately four feet apart. Place the crowns at the bottom of the trenches and cover them with about 3 inches of soil. Over the growing season, you will slowly fill the trench over several weeks. The crowns should not be covered all at once. Keep the weeds under control and water the crowns regularly to help them

establish. Popular varieties include Jersey Giant, Jersey King, Jersey Knight, Jersey Supreme, and Purple Passion. Let them grow this year and start harvesting next spring. Happy Growing!!



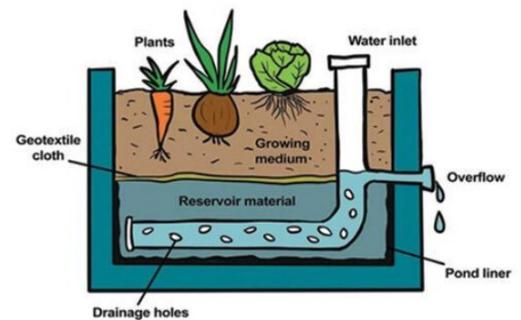
Water Wicking Garden Beds

At our February Master Gardener meeting, we had a wonderful presentation given by Carissa Underhill on her homemade water-wicking garden beds. Carissa's desire to create water-wicking beds stemmed from her goal to reduce her garden's water use. She has used her garden beds for several years and usually waters them only about 4 times during the growing season. I want to thank Carissa for allowing me to use her photos and for her knowledge in writing this article.

A wicking bed is a self-watering raised garden bed, and even though the design is a relatively innovative one that is catching



the attention of many produce gardeners worldwide, it is essentially nothing more than a large-scale version of a self-watering pot. Self-watering pots have been around for decades, and are based on the principle of sub-irrigation, where the water supply sits below the pot that is wicked upward into the soil in the container above. As with any gardening system, there are pros and cons to using wicking raised beds. Wicking beds are great for situations where watering is infrequent, such as community gardens and school gardens, where nobody is present over holiday periods to water the garden beds. The water reservoir in a wicking bed can sustain plants for several weeks, depending on climate, season, and location. They're also helpful for gardening under and around trees with invasive roots that extract every last bit of moisture from the soil. Some of the limitations concern soil moisture levels. Since water is retained in a wicking bed, this leads to a buildup of fertilizer. The evaporation of water from the soil, combined with upward wicking, can lead to salt concentrations that reach dangerous levels, potentially burning plant roots. The upward-moving water also carries excess salts, so they accumulate at the upper soil levels, where shallow-rooted seedlings are planted. The main drawback for most people is cost. Large, properly-built wicking beds can be expensive to construct.



A wicking bed can be incorporated into any raised bed design, provided it's deep enough to allow for both the soil and the water reservoir. The lower portion of the raised bed will serve as a reservoir, where water is stored until it is pulled up into the bed's soil through osmosis. This reservoir is lined with a plastic liner to retain the water. A hole is drilled through the side of the raised bed and the pond liner to accommodate the overflow pipe or hose, allowing water to flow out when the water level gets too high. At this stage, there are several different ways you can get water into the raised bed. Carissa used a perforated plastic pipe coiled along the bottom of the garden bed, with one end brought above the surface as a water source, while others will use a perforated pipe down the middle of the bed to supply the water. No matter which system you use, make sure one end is above ground level so you can fill the reservoir with water. The lower section of the raised bed is then filled with rock or gravel to hold the water. Make sure the rock layer is level to ensure even moisture wicking through the bed. This section is then covered with fabric to prevent soil from mixing with the rocks and water section. The fabric will still allow the moisture to be pulled up from the reservoir, but it will keep the gravel clean. From here, you fill your raised bed to just below the top of the bed with the soil mix of your choice. The wicking bed is filled with water from the inlet pipe, which feeds the water reservoir. When it is full, some water will flow out of the overflow outlet.

Before you fill the wicking bed, make sure your soil is wet so it will properly wick the water from the reservoir. You will then fill your wicking bed using the pipe that you ran through the reservoir. Fill it with water until it starts to run out of the overflow hole on the side of the raised bed. You can check whether you need to fill your wicking bed by feeling the soil moisture with your finger. If the top few inches are bone dry, it's time to fill your reservoir. Carissa said she typically has to fill hers maybe four times during the growing season, and often, rainfall fills it for her. The overflow hole allows excess moisture to escape from the reservoir during heavy rainfall events. Be sure to flush the system approximately once a year, if there has not been much rain, to remove excess fertilizer if you use it in your system.

If you are looking for a way to reduce your water use and your labor during the gardening season, wicking beds can be an excellent option. For even more water conservation, consider adding a mulch layer on top of the soil in the garden beds to reduce evaporation. While this article talked about larger raised beds, you can also use the same idea to make self-watering containers for container gardening, just on a smaller scale. Look for more information on container gardening in a future issue of this newsletter.



Question of the Week- Best Shrubs for Birds

People love to have birds and other wildlife in their backyards. Just as a bird feeder or a bird bath, in and of themselves, is not a guarantee of attracting birds, appropriate plants are not guaranteed to attract birds either. BUT if you combine feeders, water, habitat, structures, and plants, you will eventually succeed. Many birds are attracted to landscape and garden plants. Be aware, however, that what attracts birds will also attract other forms of wildlife, so be prepared! This week's question was specifically on shrubs for the birds, but I'm going to include a few different species as well.

Birds are attracted to plants that provide them with cover from weather conditions and predators. These plants can be evergreens, trees, or shrubs that form thickets, giving cover. I recommend incorporating an evergreen into your landscape to provide wind cover for the birds. This can be a plant that is planted or Christmas trees placed outdoors after the holiday season is over. Some plants that can provide those characteristics include evergreens such as Rocky Mountain Juniper, Easter Redcedar, blackhaw viburnum, dogwood species, both plum species, witchhazel, and sumac species.

Birds also love shrubs that provide food year-round. If you are planning to plant shrubs for their fruit or nuts, be sure to plant a variety so there is food available year-round, including winter. Some of the shrubs mentioned in the paragraph above will provide food sources for birds as well as cover. Other options include beautyberry, elderberry, Hazelnuts, ninebark, blackberry, raspberry, chokecherry, and golden currants. In my garden, I also plant purple coneflower specifically for the yellow finch, and they feed on them all summer long.

Feeding the birds isn't just about providing water and putting out bird feeders. To attract a wide variety of species, you need to provide habitat and additional food sources. For more information on plants for birds, check out the [Trees and Shrubs that Attract Songbirds](#) publication or [Landscaping for the Birds](#).



Plant of the Week- Pussy Willow

One of the earliest blooming plants, even though they aren't what we traditionally think of as blooms, in the landscape is the Pussy Willow. This harbinger of spring is a deciduous shrub native to Nova Scotia, Maryland, Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa. Pussy willows are known for their late winter/early spring display of gray, fuzzy catkins. A catkin is a slim, cylindrical flower cluster that is usually wind-pollinated. Before the foliage emerges in the spring, the male trees display long, pearl-gray, silky catkins that are approximately 1-1.5" long. This shrub gets its common name from the catkins that are said to resemble a cat's paw. Pussy willows are dioecious plants, meaning they have male and female plants. Pussy willows are traditionally large multi-stemmed shrubs that range in size from 6-15' tall. However, they can also be grown in a weeping form on a standard or pruned to maintain a smaller

size. This willow prefers moist soils but is more tolerant of dry soils than other varieties. Unfortunately, this plant can develop numerous issues, including cankers, powdery mildew, scab, and other insect problems; however, it does make a beautiful shrub in a landscape. Like other willows, they must be kept from sewers, water lines, or drains as the roots seek the water.

Weed of the Week-Henbit

Henbit is a winter annual weed that sprouts in the fall, goes dormant over the winter, and then blooms in the spring. Once we have warm weather, it dies until the fall when the seeds sprout again. This plant is a low-growing member of the mint family with square stems, rounded to heart-shaped leaves with lobed edges, and pink to purple flowers produced at the top of the plant. Control of henbit is best done in the fall, before it emerges, or right after it emerges. It is too late to spray once the plant has come up in the spring and started to bloom. In the fall, a pre-emergent can be applied in September (as long as you are not seeding cool-season grasses in the area), or you can spray the weeds in October with 2,4-D, Round-up, Trimec, or similar products. Be sure to read the label for the application rate and timing. For now, enjoy the beautiful blooms beneficial for pollinators, and keep your lawn as healthy as possible to help keep it weed-free. Henbit can be invasive if not controlled; however, it is also beneficial to pollinators, so feel free to let it grow if you wish.



Garfield



Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:

March 4th- Naturalistic Landscape Design Style

April 1st- April Showers, Rain Garden Flowers

May 6th- Natives vs. Cultivars--Making Informed Choices for Your Landscape

Upcoming Events:

March 7th 9-11 am- Seed Swap at First Baptist Church in Augusta

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

March 11th at 5:30 pm- Companion Vegetable Planting at Benton Community Building

March 26th-Simple Morea Classes on Kokedama and Planted Wall Hanging

Activity of the Month

Growing Microgreens



This week's activity is growing microgreens. Microgreens are young and tender edible greens produced by sprouting the seeds of a variety of vegetable and herbaceous plants. Microgreens tops can be harvested from 7 to 21 days after germination, depending on the variety, when the cotyledon leaves have fully developed, and the first true

leaves have emerged. Microgreens should not be confused with sprouts, which are sprouted seeds, often started in the dark, that you eat the entire plant, including the roots. Many edible plant species can be used as microgreens.

Some of the most common belong to the Brassica family, including radish, cauliflower, kale, arugula, cabbage, mustard, and cress. At the same time, beets, peas, spinach, lettuce, carrots, and other legumes are also popular choices. Some people also will use aromatic herbs such as basil, dill, chives, or cumin as microgreens. My favorite microgreens are a mix of different species to get a variety of different flavors for salads or as toppers on dishes. Many seed companies have developed specific varieties of each plant that work best as microgreens. Their catalogs are a good place to start if you are considering growing microgreens. When planting, be sure to sow the seeds thickly, as directed, to get the most benefit from the container you are using. Broadcast the seeds evenly over the soilless potting media in the container you are using. (Never use soil from outside, as it could be contaminated, and I wouldn't reuse the potting soil for multiple applications.) Cover the seed with a thin layer of soilless media and then place a plastic germination cover over the container. Treat these seeds as if you were starting vegetables in the spring (keep the soil damp, use a heat mat if you have one, and keep the seeds covered until they have begun to sprout). It's best to grow one type of microgreen per container unless you are growing a species with similar growth rates and germination times. Once the microgreens have grown their first set of true leaves, you can harvest them by cutting the stems above the soil line, leaving the roots behind. Use clean, sharp scissors or a knife to harvest your microgreens. They have a short shelf life in the refrigerator, so only harvest what you need. Check out next week's Grapevine for recipe ideas using Microgreens!





**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

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