The Grapevine

Wildflower Propagation

Native plants are becoming popular in home landscaping and you can start many native wildflowers at home from seed. The tricky part about many native plant seeds is that they have built-in mechanisms to prevent immediate germination in harsh conditions such as hot, dry, summer weather, and cold winters. For successful germination, these seeds need to winter through a cold, moist period, called stratification while some seeds may also need scarification or an alteration of the seed coat to allow quicker water absorption and improve germination. I'll talk about scarification later, but an easy way to accomplish stratification is to sow seeds in a milk jug outdoors over winter. Clear, plastic gallon milk jugs with the cap off allow rain and snow to keep the mix moist and then greenhouse-like warm, damp conditions later in the spring to help with seedling growth. This method is recommended by the Yale Peabody Museum in Connecticut.

For this project, you will need the following:

- Milk Jugs (rinsed out)
- Box knife or scissors
- Perennial seeds
- Seedling soil mix
- Top dressing material (grit, sand, peat moss, aquarium gravel)
- Duct tape
- Label

Here’s how to set up such a milk jug.

1. Working on a safe surface poke a few holes in the bottom of the jug to allow for drainage.

2. Using the box knife or scissors, cut around the jug, below the handle. Don’t cut the entire way around, leave a small section still attached.

3. Place about 3 inches of pre-moistened seedling mix into the jug. Leave a little room above the soil surface to the cut you made in the jug. Seedling mix is preferred for this over regular potting soil because it has the correct balance of aeration, moisture retention and sterility required for high germination rates. Potting soil is typically heavier and may have more nutrients than seedlings need resulting in poor germination and root development.

4. Sprinkle your seeds on the surface of the soil. Some seeds, especially very small seeds, may need sunlight in order to germinate and should be left on the surface. Other seeds will need a light covering of soil on top of the seeds. Follow the directions on the seed packet or research your plants online. Lightly sprinkle your top dressing on top of the soil. This prevents “dampening off” of seedlings from fungal or bacterial diseases as they germinate.

5. Duct tape the opening of your jug to re-seal the container. This helps hold in moisture and create a mini-greenhouse effect as the seedlings germinate. Place the milk jugs where they receive morning sun which will be key in late spring. Check the seedlings regularly and as they develop true leaves thin the plants out to give them more room.
Proper Storage of Pesticides

Most of us have pesticides in or around our house whether they are organic or synthetic. With colder temperatures coming, now is the perfect time to analyze your pesticide storage practices and ensure they are up to snuff for the growing season. In a slightly concerning statistic, a nationwide study by the Environmental Protection Agency revealed that almost one-half of surveyed households with children under the age of 5 had at least one pesticide stored within their reach. Let’s take a minute to review some tips on storing chemicals safely and what not to do.

Proper pesticide storage helps prolong chemical shelf life while protecting the health of people, animals, and the environment. Shelf life is the period of time a pesticide can be stored before it becomes less effective or ineffective. **Read the product label for specific storage information.** The label should be with your products at all times. Keep chemicals in a location that stays above freezing year-round. A metal cabinet is the best option for storing chemicals, but any cabinet with a lock will do. Leave the chemical in its original container, and never keep chemicals in food or drink containers. There have been several instances where people have been killed because they accidentally drank pesticides that were stored in a drink container. Pesticides shouldn’t be kept in cabinets near food, potable water, animal feed, medical supplies, protective clothing, seed, fertilizers, or gasoline. This will prevent contamination of these products from vapors, dusts, or spills, and reduce the likelihood of accidental human, animal, or environmental exposure.

Pesticides are a tool in the toolbox of any gardener. Storing the products correctly will help you save money and improve the effectiveness of the products you purchase. One final tip, write the year you purchased the product on the container so you know when to dispose of the product after it's reached its shelf life.

Hardy Orange

Did you know that we can grow a citrus tree outdoors in Kansas? While we can't grow a lemon, lime, or grapefruit tree in our climate, we can grow a Hardy Orange or *Citrus trifoliata*. The Hardy or Trifoliate orange is native to China and while they are in the same family as citrus fruits, this plant has its own genus. The common name "hardy orange" is used as this plant is the closest we can get to a hardy citrus as it will grow to zone 5b. This plant was brought from China in the late 1800s to provide a hardy rootstalk to seedless oranges in California. A fun fact, a shelter belt of these hardy oranges has been used to control jaywalking on the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater for over 50 years.

The hardy orange has sweet-smelling, showy white flowers in the spring that transition to yellowish, orange fruits in late summer or early fall. The fruit is edible, however, it tends to contain more seeds than pulp. The fruit also has a high acidity level that requires quite a bit of sugar to overcome and can cause an upset stomach if eaten in large quantities. Some people will make marmalade from the fruit. Many people leave the fruit on all winter for ornamental purposes. Plant trees in full sun to partial shade, away from heavy traffic areas to avoid contact with the impressive thorns. This small tree-to-large shrub grows up to 14 feet tall and up to 10 feet wide in warmer climates with compound leaves with three leaflets that are shiny green and approximately one to two inches long.

Video of the week: Saving Money on Vegetable Seeds

Quality seeds and plants are important to have a successful garden. This segment has tips on how to make the most of your seeds. It also includes factors to consider when buying, growing, and planting transplants to help you have a successful garden. Watch the video here: [https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/saving-money-on-vegetable-seeds-and-plants](https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/saving-money-on-vegetable-seeds-and-plants)
Reminders-
- Continue to remove leaves from the lawn. Use them in flowerbeds or the vegetable garden
- Plant any spring flowering bulbs if you haven’t yet
- Add organic material to the vegetable garden
- Send in a soil test to beat the spring rush

Growing an Indoor Salad Garden

Supplies
- Container at least 6” deep
- Potting Soil
- Water
- Sunny Window
- Salad Green Mix seeds

Directions:
1. Choose a container at least 6” deep. Larger pots have more room for roots to grow and dry out slower.
2. Fill the container with damp potting soil to an inch below the top of the pot.
3. Scatter the seeds with about 1/2 inch spacing onto freshly prepared potting mixture.
4. Add 1/4 inch of potting mix on top.
5. Water gently after planting, keeping the soil surface moist until plants emerge.
6. Place the pot in a window where they get five to six hours of light.
7. If needed, apply small amounts of fertilizer (half-strength) when the plants are 4 to 6 inches tall and every two weeks after that.
8. When plants reach a height of four to six inches, use a pair of clean kitchen scissors or shears to cut the plants, carefully leaving behind about an inch of leafy growth.
Upcoming Events

- **January 3rd at Noon - A How-to in Floral Design**
  Join us for the first K-State Garden Hour of 2024 as we step into the world of floral design and beautiful flowers. Watch a live tutorial of a Valentine’s Day arrangement, provided by Irina Sheshukova, Extension Specialist and Instructor in the Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources at Kansas State University. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/)

- **January 24th at 7 pm - Starting a New Landscape or Garden**
  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 at the Butler County Community/4-H Building, 206 N Griffith St. El Dorado, KS (behind the Health Department).

- **February 7th at Noon - Gardening for a Changing Climate**
  Gardening in Kansas doesn't come easy, as we often face weather extremes and drought conditions. With projected changes in our climate, gardening will be more challenging. Extreme events will require adaptation with plant selection, irrigation, and soil health. Join Dr. Charles Rice, Noble Peace Prize winner and Kansas State University Distinguished Professor of Soil Microbiology, to learn how to overcome the challenges of gardening in a changing climate. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/)

- **February 10th at 10 AM - Gardening for Beginners**
  Join us for an enriching gardening class on February 10th. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or a beginner, this event will provide valuable insights and tips to prepare your garden for the upcoming season. Learn essential techniques and get ready for a vibrant and successful gardening experience. This class is free to the public. Join us at the Andover Public Library located at: 1511 E Central Ave, Andover, KS 67002

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