The Grapevine

Dividing Iris

Iris are one of the easiest perennial plants to grow and provides an abundance of beauty through the home landscape. While Iris are easy to care for they can quickly outgrow their space and if they are crowded the plants won’t bloom very well. It’s best to divide this plant every three to five years to encourage vigorous blooms. The best time to divide Iris is from mid-July through early-August when they are dormant for the summer. The root system of Iris consists of thick rhizomes (horizontal underground stem) with smaller shallow feeder roots. It’s best to dig up a clump of iris then divide and reset the plants. Use a sharp knife to cut the rhizomes apart so each division consists of at least one fan of leaves and a section of rhizome. If possible leave two fans per rhizome, similar to the photo above, as these “double fans” will produce more flowers in the first year after planting. Divisions with a single fan will still bloom however it will take them a year before they have as many flowers as a double fan. Before replanting your divisions of iris make sure to inspect the rhizome for disease or damage and discard any pieces that show signs of borers or soft rot. You can remove borers from a rhizome if you wish or treat for soft rot by scraping the affected tissue, letting it dry then dipping it in a 10% bleach solution. Once you have divided the iris be sure to cut the leaves back by two thirds before replanting. Plant iris 12-18” apart, closer for dwarf varieties, and plant so the top of the rhizome is still visible above the surface. Before replanting your iris make sure to inspect the rhizome for disease or damage and discard any pieces that show signs of borers or soft rot. You can remove borers from a rhizome if you wish or treat for soft rot by scraping the affected tissue, letting it dry then dipping it in a 10% bleach solution. Once you have divided the iris be sure to cut the leaves back by two thirds before replanting. Plant iris 12-18” apart, closer for dwarf varieties, and plant so the top of the rhizome is still visible above the surface. Before replanting your iris make sure to inspect the rhizome for disease or damage and discard any pieces that show signs of borers or soft rot. You can remove borers from a rhizome if you wish or treat for soft rot by scraping the affected tissue, letting it dry then dipping it in a 10% bleach solution. Once you have divided the iris be sure to cut the leaves back by two thirds before replanting. Plant iris 12-18” apart, closer for dwarf varieties, and plant so the top of the rhizome is still visible above the surface. Before replanting your iris make sure to inspect the rhizome for disease or damage and discard any pieces that show signs of borers or soft rot. You can remove borers from a rhizome if you wish or treat for soft rot by scraping the affected tissue, letting it dry then dipping it in a 10% bleach solution. Once you have divided the iris be sure to cut the leaves back by two thirds before replanting. Plant iris 12-18” apart, closer for dwarf varieties, and plant so the top of the rhizome is still visible above the surface. Before replanting your iris make sure to inspect the rhizome for disease or damage and discard any pieces that show signs of borers or soft rot. You can remove borers from a rhizome if you wish or treat for soft rot by scraping the affected tissue, letting it dry then dipping it in a 10% bleach solution. Once you have divided the iris be sure to cut the leaves back by two thirds before replanting. Plant iris 12-18” apart, closer for dwarf varieties, and plant so the top of the rhizome is still visible above the surface.

Walnut Caterpillars

I have had several calls on Walnut caterpillars this week. These caterpillars feed only on the foliage of trees in the Juglandaceae family including walnuts, pecans and hickory trees. In large numbers these caterpillars can defoliate large trees and severely affect tree vigor. The larvae tend to feed in groups or clusters, consuming all the leaves on a single branch before moving to another branch. There can be one to two lifecycles per year and unfortunately, we are currently in the first life cycle. The caterpillars feed for approximately one month before reaching maturity. Fully grown (5th instar) caterpillars are characterized by having dark bodies with yellow stripes and white hairs as they mature however the third and fourth instar caterpillars are red in color. When disturbed the caterpillars will arch their head and end of the abdomen to ward off predators. Adult walnut caterpillars’ moths have approximately a 1 ¾” wingspan and the wings light brown with four narrow brown bands on each front wing. The primary effective means of dealing with infestations of walnut caterpillars are to hand-pick caterpillars and place in a container of soapy water, use a forceful water spray to quickly dislodge caterpillars, or apply insecticides with one of the following active ingredients: acephate, spinosad, malathion, cyfluthrin, permethrin, or bifenthrin.
**Renovating June-Bearing Strawberries**

Healthy strawberry plantings will be productive for three to four harvest seasons however, after that they will need renovated in order to stay productive. The best time to renovate strawberries is after you have finished harvesting. The renovation process involves several steps including reducing the row size, removing leaves and fertilizing. One of the main goals in renovation is to provide a high level of sunlight to plant leaves so they can manufacture the food the plant needs. If leaves have disease spots, remove all the leaves in the bed. Removing, these diseased leaves and weeds will cause new, non-diseased leaves to develop and remove competition from weedy plants. Till or hoe each row of strawberries leaving a band of plants about 8 to 10 inches wide or remove small, weak plants throughout the bed, leaving a healthy plant every four to six inches. You can then remove all the leaves about 1 inch above the crowns either with a lawn mower or cut them all off. Follow the mowing up by covering the crowns with about one inch of soil over the top. Care for the plants the rest of the summer as you would a new planting by watering regularly and not letting the strawberries dry out in the heat of the summer. It’s best to fertilize strawberries in August to encourage growth. The mother plants will form runners or daughter plants throughout the summer. These daughter plants will root down then start storing food and setting bloom buds for the following spring. Remove the flowers of these daughter plants in the spring to allow the planting to produce more fruit the next year.

**Reseeding Cool Season Lawn**

The best time to seed cool season grasses is in September however, while the weather outside is hot, July is the time to start preparing to seed cool season grasses for the best success. The first step to seeding a new lawn is to kill the current grass and weeds that are growing in the area. If you are trying to remove a Bermuda grass lawn it likely will take several spray applications in order to effectively kill all the Bermuda grass growing. If the summer has been dry, water the area in well a couple days before you spray to encourage the grass and weeds to be actively taking up nutrients. This will make your herbicide application more effective. Be sure to follow the recommended label rate for application of the herbicide. This is also the perfect time to do a soil test so you can add the amendments recommended during the next step of preparing your lawn for seeding.

Once you have killed the current grass and weeds the next step in August is to work up the ground and add in any soil amendments that might have been recommended. Grass seed will need contact with the ground in order to germinate and grow, so tilling or verticutting the area will allow the seed to get the necessary ground contact. If you do use a tiller to work the soil, make sure you don’t work the ground till it is powdery in texture. You want small clods of soil to prevent the ground from crusting when you water or during rain storms as this can result in poor germination and an uneven stand of grass seedlings. Make sure you grade the soil so there aren’t any holes but there is still drainage for heavy water to flow as needed. New construction or areas with compacted soils will need worked about 6 inches deep to break up the compaction and give the seed an area to root into.

The next step starting in September is to sow the cool season grass seed. Follow the recommended seeding rates of 6 to 8 pounds per 1000 sq ft for tall fescue and 2-3 pounds for Kentucky Bluegrass. A gravity flow spreader, one that drops the seed between the wheels, is the most accurate but a rotary spreader is faster. After spreading the seed be sure to apply a starter fertilizer over the area to give the grass seedlings a boost. Once you have spread the seed and fertilizer use a rake over the area to blend the seed into the top surface of the soil. Make sure to water your area regularly, possibly a couple times a day, to keep the soil surface damp and give the seedlings the best start. Mulch can be used to cover the soil to help keep the soil damp and prevent evaporation. As the seedlings emerge slowly decrease your watering frequency as the grass starts to develop a root system to encourage a deeper root system. Once the grass seedlings are 3 inches tall you can start mowing it at a height of 2 inches which stimulates the grass to spread out rather than up.
Video of the week: Growing Fruit in a Small Urban Landscape
There is nothing like fresh fruit picked from your own backyard. Homeowners often feel that they can't grow fruit because of a lack of space. However, there are lots of options to incorporating fruit-bearing trees, bushes, and groundcover into a small urban landscape. Watch the video here: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/planting-a-fall-garden

Summer Green Bean Salad
This is one of the best salads to make when the corn is really fresh. The easiest way to cook the corn is in the microwave. Cut off one end, microwave for 4 minutes, remove with hot pad – shake the corn out of the husk. Even though the basil will get a little dark, this salad gets better the next day.

Ingredients
- 1 pound (approximately 3 cups) green beans, washed and trimmed
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- 2 ears corn, cooked and cut off the cob
- 4 ounces (approximately ⅓ cup) ricotta salata or feta, shredded finely or crumbled
- 3 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup packed basil leaves, cut into thin ribbons (chiffonade)
- Salt to taste

Directions
- Cook the green beans in salted water until just done – do not overcook. Chill well (approximately 15-30 minutes).
- In a large bowl, combine the cherry tomatoes, corn, and green beans.
- Add cheese to the vegetable mixture.
- Make the vinaigrette by combining the vinegar and mustard then add the oil in a thin stream while beating.
- Add the dressing to the vegetable mixture.
- Top with the basil.
- Salt to taste.
Reminders-

- Core aerate zoysia to prevent thatch build-up and aerate the soil.
- Side dress tomatoes when they are full sized but still green. Do not over fertilize or you will get less fruit.
- Sharpen your lawn mower blade.

Upcoming Events

- **July 20-25th, 2022: Butler County Fair**
  Don’t forget to stop by the Fairgrounds and check out all the 4-H and other exhibits at the Butler County Fair. Check out the Open class list and bring some of your projects or produce to exhibit at the fair this year!!! For more information, including the schedule and a list of Open class exhibits check out the fair website: https://www.butler.k-state.edu/4hfair/

- **August 2nd at Noon- Integrating Native Plants into your Home Landscape**
  Native plants are growing in popularity in the home landscape. Dr. Sharon Ashworth, Douglas County Horticulture & Natural Resources Extension Agent, will discuss the ecological benefits of native plants and how to successfully integrate natives into your landscape. Learn about what defines a native plant, which native plants work best, and what maintenance is required to grow a beautiful landscape of natives. 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/

- **September 6th at Noon- Integrating Native Plants into your Home Landscape**
  Native plants are growing in popularity in the home landscape. Dr. Sharon Ashworth, Douglas County Horticulture & Natural Resources Extension Agent, will discuss the ecological benefits of native plants and how to successfully integrate natives into your landscape. Learn about what defines a native plant, which native plants work best, and what maintenance is required to grow a beautiful landscape of natives. 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/

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