

The Grapevine

Gardening with Kids

Some of my earliest memories involve being around plants and helping in the gardening. This tradition is one that I want to pass on to my son as he grows up. Gardens can be a wonderful place for kids. They provide a variety of opportunities to learn, play and have fun. Studies have found that introducing youth to gardening encourages them to eat a wider variety of fruits and veggies they haven't tried before and the garden is a wonderful place to mix education and fun. Teaching youth about gardening doesn't have to be limited to just the outdoors and our normal growing season, teaching youth how to take care of houseplants can teach a variety of lessons as well. Here are some tips on involving your kids in the garden and with plants.

One of the first lessons I learned was to start small and set realistic goals with kids and gardening. Break tasks down into smaller chunks, especially with young kids, to fit their attention span and interest levels. That might mean you only plant one row of corn at a time instead of the whole section or you only water a few plants indoors at a time. Setting realistic goals and activities will help you as the adult have fun and the kids have fun. When I first started gardening with my then toddler I skipped this step and the first few times we were in the garden ended in frustration on my part. Once I adjusted my expectations our ventures into the garden became fun for everyone. Your role in the garden should be as a facilitator rather than a dictator telling them how to do everything. Show the kids what you want done then walk them through and let them do it. There will be some messes but both of you will learn more from the messes than anything else.



Give your child a job. Kids, especially young kids love to help and to have a task that is theirs to do. Pick a task that will fit your child's age and abilities, for example planting small seeds is probably not a good choice for a young child while planting potatoes or pumpkin seeds would work. Large seeds could be boring for an older child but smaller seeds can add a challenge that will keep their attention. Pick something that won't impact the garden if they do mess up on accident. Other options of tasks include pulling weeds, shredding paper for mulch, watering or putting dirt in flower pots. At home my little guy loves to water so he has his own watering can and he waters the bigger plants that will tolerate getting a bit too much every once in a while.

As kids get older give them ownership in their garden. An excellent option is to give kids a small portion of the garden that is theirs for the summer. They get to pick what they want to grow then maintain that portion of the garden throughout the growing season. Once the produce is ready to pick they get to choose where it goes once it's harvested or how they want to eat it. Another way to give ownership is to put one kid in charge of a task such as running the wheel barrow or watering. As kids get older remember that gardening may become "uncool" and working with them one on one may work better than in a group.



Gardening should be a fun and educational activity for kids. Be sure to reflect with the kids after completing an activity. Depending on the age group this reflection period could be as simple as asking what was planted or what we did. As you work with your kids try to foster a sense of discovery and hands-on activities. Gardening can become dull and boring, especially toward the end of the growing season but take the time to encourage their natural curiosity. If you don't know the answer to a question, take time to look it up and read books on gardening. Remember that in the garden you are their role model and what you do they will follow. Remember to show them how to be safe in the garden and read the labels of any products you are using. Above all, make gardening fun. Look for the worms when you plant or throw the maple seeds and watch them fly to the ground. Go out and get dirty with your kids this summer because education shouldn't be limited to the classroom. Happy Growing!!!

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Weed of the Week- Nutsedge

Our weed this week is the Yellow Nutsedge. This grassy looking weed is actually a sedge (hence the name) and is unfortunately very difficult to control in the home lawn as traditional lawn chemicals are not effective against it. Yellow nutsedge is pale green to yellow in color with triangular stems and leaves that shoot off in three directions. This weed grows rapidly in the spring and early summer, and because of this rapid growth will stick up above newly mowed grass just a couple days after it has been mowed. Another factor that makes nutsedge difficult to control is that it produces numerous tubers that give rise to new weeds if disturbed. This means that unlike many other weeds, we cannot simply pull nutsedge once to control it as this activates the dormant tubers to grow new plants.

You can possibly control nutsedge by pulling it but this could take several seasons of persistence to actually see results. There are chemical measures you can take to control nutsedge. The best time to spray this weed is to wait till it has reached three to eight leaves before spraying. This timing results in improved translocation down to the tubers and rhizomes resulting in better control. There are only a few products on the market that work for sedges including Sedgehammer, Hi-Yield nutsedge and horsetail control or products containing the active ingredient sulfentrazone. If you are planning on spraying sedges the first application should be done by June 21st otherwise dormant daughter tubers may be stimulated to grow.



Plant of the Week- Creeping Phlox



This week I want to highlight creeping phlox also called moss phlox. This spring blooming perennial has a dense, spreading, mat-like habit. It is a fairly short plant, topping out at approximately six inches tall and can spread up to two to three feet in width. Creeping phlox is native to central and eastern portions of Canada and the United States. In it's native area it is commonly found on dry, rocky or sandy areas, rocky ledges, slopes, clearings or open woodlands. This perennial is prized for it's creeping habit and blooms. The leaves of this phlox are green, linear to awl shaped and needle like. The blooms are vibrant in color and one of the earliest perennials to bloom. The blooms range in color from white to red to lavender to blue-purple and it typically blooms from April

through May. Creeping phlox prefers moist, well drained soils and flowers best in full sun however, in hot and humid climates the plant would like some dappled afternoon sun. Phlox is relatively disease and insect free, it is resistant to powdery mildew unlike many other phlox species. It is best to trim the plant back after blooming to encourage dense growth. This plant works well as an edge plant in the garden, on slopes or in naturalized areas. Rabbits might nibble on it but the foliage is resistant to deer.

Issue of the Week- Grubs

There have been several reports of grubs in lawns already this spring. Grubs are small worm-like pests that feed on grass roots and organic material in a home lawn, eventually causing sections of it to die. Grubs are the larval form of several different scarab beetles and are typically fairly easy to see. White grubs are pudgy, off white larvae with a brown head and are typically bent in the shape of the letter "C". The adult beetles of our white grubs are either Japanese beetles or masked chafers. Japanese Beetles are a shiny metallic green with wing covers that are coppery red. Masked chafer beetles are tan or straw brown in color and have a black stripe across their eyes and face. The adults beetles typically emerge and begin flying in June and start to lay eggs in July. The grubs feed rapidly and are fully grown in August or September.

The grubs then move down in the soil to overwinter before moving back up to the surface of the soil in the late spring to pupate and emerge as adults. Grub damage typically shows up as dead patches in the yard. The best way to check if



the damage to your lawn was caused by grubs is to pull on the grass. If it comes up easily you likely have a grub issues. Another sign up have grubs is if animals such as racoons and skunks are digging up patches of your yard. If you suspect grubs, cut a one foot square section of your lawn and peel back the grass to reveal the soil underneath (If you have a significant amount of grub damage the lawn should peel easily). Sift around in the soil and count the number of grubs you find. If you find 10 or more, you have a major grub issue. Replace the area of sod you cut out and water it in thoroughly. If you found a large number of grubs your best bet might be to treat the lawn. There are two times to control grubs, the first is in April or May with products containing the active ingredient called chlorantraniliprole or use a grub preventer in July to kill the newly hatched grubs before they become a problem.

Reminders-

- Harvest asparagus until spear size diminishes. Usually 6 to 8 weeks after first harvest.
- It is too early to spray for bagworms
- It is too late to spray for peach leaf curl
- Start fruit spray schedule after petal drop.
- Allow lawn to dry until see purplish areas in lawn before watering as this increases drought hardiness.

Video of the week: Controlling Nutsedge in Lawns

Yellow nutsedge is a relatively common problem in lawns, especially in wet years or in lawns with irrigation. Although it looks like a grass, it is actually a sedge -- which can be hard to control. This segment looks at several ways to get rid of this weed. Watch the video here: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/controlling-yellow-nutsedge-in-the-lawn>

Upcoming Events

- *May 3rd at Noon- Drought Tolerant Plants for a Challenging Kansas Landscape*
The Kansas climate throws numerous extremes at our landscape plants. The most common climate extreme is periods of drought, which are difficult for both plants and gardeners. Join Jason Graves, Central Kansas District Horticulture Extension Agent, and Matthew McKernan, Sedgwick County Horticulture Extension Agent, as they address our climate challenges and provide suggestions for drought tolerant plants that will make gardening easier. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>
- *June 7th at Noon- Drought Tolerant Lawns of Kansas- Warm Season Turfgrass*
Kansas weather is extreme, but summers are frequently hot and dry. Join Dr. Ross Braun, Assistant Professor of Turfgrass and Landscape Management, as he explains what it means to live in our “transitional climatic zone”, with the option to grow both cool- and warm-season turfgrass species. Learn how to grow grass species that are more drought tolerant, in order to better survive our summer weather and conserve water. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>