The Grapevine

Season Extension

Last week felt more like August rather than late September with the high temperatures and lack of moisture. With the heat it’s hard to think about frost even though we are just a few weeks away from our 50/50 chance of having a nighttime temperature of 32 degrees. Despite the fact we are entering October, there is still some growing season left and there are ways to keep growing vegetables even beyond the first freeze. Let’s take a look at some options to extend your gardening season.

There are many ways to extend your vegetable growing season whether you are trying to grow later in the fall or start growing vegetables earlier in the spring. One of the easiest methods is to utilize floating row covers over the top of the plants similar to the photo to the right. Floating row covers are a spun-bonded polyester or polypropylene material fabric that comes in a variety of thicknesses depending on what you plan to use it for. You can use the fabric to create a low tunnel with hoops to hold the row cover over the top of the plants. Floating row covers will work to keep cool season crops warm during frosts including under snow however there are limits to how cold floating row covers can keep plants warm. This option works to keep the plants warmer and thinner fabrics can also used to exclude unwanted insects during the growing season.

Cold frames are another option for extending the growing season both starting plants in the spring but also allows you to grow cold tolerant vegetables late into the winter season. Cold frames are typically low wooden boxes or frames with glass (often old storm windows), polycarbonate or polyethylene film covers, which are set in the soil or over beds in the garden. Cold frames are often constructed with a sloping top and set facing the south to capture the most winter sun. Tops may also be peaked or arched with hoops that support a polyethylene film covering. Polyethylene film is the same thing as plastic sheeting, but for applications such as cold frames and high tunnels, special greenhouse film is used, which is typically 6 mils thick and treated with a UV blocking material so that it will last at least four years.

Low tunnels are hoop-supported row covers, too low to walk in. Tunnels high enough to walk in are called high tunnels. Low tunnels may be covered with polyethylene film or floating row cover and may vary in width to span a single row or one or more beds in the garden. Floating row covers of varying weights can be used during much of the year and can be replaced by polyethylene film during the winter. Lighter row cover can be used during the spring and summer, and heavier row cover can be used in the late and early winter for freeze protection. For covering in the winter, greenhouse polyethylene is preferred because it can be saved, and reused from year to year, but standard 6 mil polyethylene may be easier to obtain.

Fresh vegetables are a staple of many households and there are many ways to extend the growing season long past the first frost well into winter. Last winter I actually had a broccoli plant that survived all winter under leaves to be eaten in the spring. Try one of these season extension ideas this fall in your garden today.
Indian grass
This native grass is putting on quite a show right now with its gorgeous seed heads on full display. Indian grass is considered one of the “Big Three” of the native grasses along with Big Bluestem and Switchgrass. These grasses grow in the Tall Grass prairie which historically stretched from Illinois west to Kansas and from Minnesota south to Texas with approximately 4 to 13% of the original prairie remaining. The scientific name, *Sorghastrum nutans*, perfectly describes this grass with the genus name meaning “imitation of sorghum” and the species meaning “swaying” as the seed head swaying in the wind looks similar to sorghum (milo) swaying in the wind. Indian grass is a tall bunch grass reaching heights from 3 to 8 feet depending on the soil with broad blue-green leaf blades that turn orange to purple in the fall giving it multiple seasons of interest in the landscape. The seed head is large, soft, and plume-like with a yellow to gold color. Indian grass prefers lowland soils and tolerates some flooding in its native range but it also grows rocky poor soils and handles drought and heat conditions. This grass is a wonderful addition to any landscape and pollinator garden. Remember that it will slowly spread so give it space to grow for best results. Indian grass is wonderful for wildlife with birds eating on the seed heads and it is also resistant to deer browsing even though it is loved by cattle. This native does not do well in shade and may flop over in very moist and rich soils. Cut the grass down in the spring right before it starts growing as the leaves will help protect the crown through the winter.

Common Ragweed
If you have been suffering from hay fever this fall a common weed is your culprit rather than often blamed goldenrod. Common Ragweed is an annual, herbaceous weed that is native to North America. This weed is common in crop fields, non-crop areas, waste areas and landscapes where it can be a major issue. Ragweed leaves are narrow to broadly egg shaped, hairy, compound and deeply lobed. The flowers on these plants are inconspicuous being green in color and on the tips of the stem. This plant has male and female flowers held on different parts of the plant. All members of this family are abundant pollen producers which leads them to being a major allergy causing plant in the late summer. Ragweed can grow up to 6 feet tall depending on the soil and growing conditions. This weed can be confused with western ragweed however western ragweed is a perennial plant and has leaves that have fewer lobes compared to common ragweed. Common ragweed is an important plant for various wildlife species as honeybees will collect the pollen from the plant, many species of upland game birds and songbirds rely on the seeds for a food source especially in the winter since the seeds usually will stick up above the snow level and many species of insects feed extensively upon the leaves throughout the growing season. Control can be difficult as common ragweed has seeds that persist in the ground for years and it was one of the first plants to develop resistance to herbicides. The easiest way to control this weed is through physical removal or using a mix of chemicals however, unless it is in a location that it is detrimental it might be beneficial to leave it for food for songbirds in the winter.

Whitefly
There has been an influx of whitefly on outdoor plants of all kinds in the last few days. These insects are small, white flying insects that resemble moths and love almost any and all vegetables or plants. Whiteflies do not overwinter well in Kansas but the population will build throughout the summer into the fall before they start to migrate south for the winter. Right now, we have waves of whiteflies migrating south so you can easily go from few insects to thousands almost overnight. At this point you don’t need to treat for whiteflies on vegetables or on outdoor plants because the insects will be gone in a few days. If you have houseplants that are outdoors be sure to treat for whiteflies before you bring them inside. Spraying the plant off with a strong stream of water will knock off most of the insects. You can treat with insecticidal soap, neem oil, pyrethrin or malathion just make sure to use a product that is labeled for the plant you are treating.
Video of the week: Extending the Garden Season
By extending the growing season, you can continue to have salad greens, beets, and carrots fresh from your garden. Low tunnels are an easy way to protect the cool season vegetables from freezing temperatures. Watch the video here: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/low-tunnels-extend-the-growing-season

Reminders-
- Buy spring flowering bulbs while the selection is still good
- Harvest winter squash when the rind is hard enough it isn’t easily punctured by a fingernail
- Add organic matter to vegetable garden this fall.
- Bring houseplants in if you haven’t already.
- Dig sweet potatoes

Greek Zoodle Salad
INGREDIENTS
- 2 zucchini
- ¼ cup red onion, diced
- ¼ English cucumber, sliced
- 10 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 10 Kalamata olives, pitted & sliced
- ¼ cup Greek dressing
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS
Cut zucchini with spiralizer tool. A peeler may be used if necessary. Place zoodles in a bowl. Add onion, cucumber, tomatoes and olives. Pour dressing over salad and toss to combine. Season as needed. (Source: https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/recipes/greek-zoodle-salad)
Upcoming Events

- **October 4th at Noon - Putting your Garden to Bed: Winter Garden Prep**
  The growing season is nearly over, but your garden work may not be done just yet. Join Anthony Reardon, Johnson County Horticulture Extension Agent, as you learn about all of the various gardening tasks that can help your landscape throughout the winter and prepare your garden for the growing season to come. 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/

- **October 15th from Noon to 4 pm - Houseplant and Perennial Plant Swap**
  Have your houseplants grown like crazy this year and need a trim or did you divide some perennials and have extras? Bring your plants to the Plant Swap hosted by the Butler County Master Gardeners. The rules are simple: 1) Bring at least one plant, cutting or seeds to trade or sell, 2) All swaps must be labeled with plant name, 3) All plants must be pest and disease free. This event is free to attend, just bring your favorite plants to share with plant lovers in your community!!! Register so we can have enough tables: https://forms.gle/ddB6As2f53Cf9PZa9

- **November 1st at Noon - Plants Gone Wild! Controlling Invasive Plants**
  Given the opportunity, certain plants can take over your landscape, woodlands, and pastures. Join Lynn Loughary, Wyandotte County Extension Horticulture Agent, as she helps you to recognize which plants you need to keep a close eye on. Learn about a few of our most invasive plants, and management strategies for their control. Discover which weeds are also regulated by law, through Kansas’s noxious weeds program. 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/

- **December 6th at Noon - Beekeeping Basics: How to Start Your own Colony**
  Beekeeping is both popular and important for many reasons. Whether it’s to produce your own local honey, supplement pollination of nearby plants, promote conservation, or even personal entertainment, there are many reasons to become a beekeeper. Join Ryan Engel, Golden Prairie District Horticulture Extension Agent, as he covers the equipment you will need, how to source your bees, and what it takes to establish a new colony. 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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