The Grapevine

Fertilizing Fruits in the Spring

One of the most common things gardeners want to do in the spring as we start working around our yards is to fertilize, especially all the fruit bushes and plants we have. While some of those plants will benefit from fertilizer in the spring, some don’t require it. Our bramble plants such as raspberries and blackberries will benefit from spring fertilizing as their new growth begins. The fertilization encourages the brambles to put on new growth which is where the berries are produced. Typically, those plants need a fertilizer high in nitrogen. Any fertilizer with a high nitrogen content will work, including lawn fertilizers as long as they don’t contain weed killers. Follow the directions on the bag for the amount to apply. As for strawberries, our Everbearing strawberries should be fertilized in the spring as new growth occurs but June bearing strawberries should not be fertilized at this time. Fertilizing June bearing strawberries in the spring can cause the berries to be soft and rot, so they should be fertilized when you renovate the bed in the fall.

Asparagus Care

Spring is Asparagus time and I know many people are enjoying harvesting and eating this tasty vegetable. As the harvest season for Asparagus starts to wind down there are a few things we need to do once harvest is over. If you have weed issues in your patch you can cut all the stalks back to just below the ground level and rake or spray the patch with a weed killer product. Another option is to scatter grass clippings around the asparagus plants to reduce the number of weeds that can grow. Once this year’s harvest is done (when the stalks start to get thinner) be sure to fertilize your patch with a general-purpose fertilizer such as a 10-10-10, 12-12-12 or something similar to help replace the nutrients that were removed by harvesting the stalks. With just a little bit of care your asparagus bed can be productive for years to come.

Late April Gardening

Late April is an odd time in the gardening world. It’s too early to plant many warm season crops with some cool nights and soil temperatures, but it’s too late to plant some of our cool season crops and have them ready before the heat of summer. At this point it’s too late to plant potatoes, radishes and cabbage but you can still plant leafy greens like lettuce or spinach till the end of the month, root crops such as turnips and carrots or even melon’s right now. As long as the weather hasn’t been cold the first round of sweet corn can be planted in the garden. At this point it’s too early to plant summer squash, cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes unless you have some sort of protection from cool nights. It’s also too early to plant pumpkins and winter squash to have them ready in the fall. It’s also never too late to do a soil test and see what type of fertilizer you need to apply.

The Garden and Storm Damage

It’s storm season in Kansas and with vegetable gardens going in one of a gardener’s biggest fears is damage to their garden by a storm. Whether it’s heavy rain, hail or wind damage there are a few things we can do to help our gardens recover after a storm.

Heavy Rain- While rain is a good thing, heavy rain can result in a hard crust on top of the soil that makes it hard for seedlings to get through. A light scraping of the soil surface can easily fix this issue.

Wind- Even though it may be tempting to straighten plants that have been pushed over by wind, don’t. Typically, they will stand back up after a couple days. Plants that are snapped off won’t recover and should be replaced.

Hail- As long as the stems aren’t damaged, plants should recover quickly from hail damage. If the plants look like they were hit by a string trimmer it’s probably best to replant but a few bruises and battered leaves won’t slow the plants down for long.
**Weed of the Week**

This week’s weed of the week is Cheatgrass or Downy brome. Cheatgrass is a winter annual that germinates in the late fall or early spring and has rapid growth through the early spring growing season. This weed has wide leaf blades that are very hairy giving it a soft feel, is light green in color and has an open, drooping seed head approximately 2 months after it starts growing. Cheatgrass will grow quickly in disturbed sites, thin lawns or recently reseeded lawns however it is not very competitive and a healthy lawn will quickly crowd it out. In a garden situation Cheatgrass can be easily controlled by pulling it and making sure as much of the ground is covered by mulch as possible. If you have a large patch of this weed, chemical control with a Glyphosate product is an option. Overall Cheatgrass can be a pain, especially in a newly seeded lawn however it is an easy one to control although it may take some time to completely eradicate it from a lawn or garden setting.

**Insect of the Week**

This week’s insect of the week is the Mason Bee. These bees are solitary and do not live in a colony or hive. It’s estimated that 40% of all of our native bees are solitary and nest in holes rather than in hives. Mason bees pollinate spring blooming flowers and trees. These bees are prolific pollinators and are being researched as a replacement for honey bees in pollinating large orchards. The queen mason bee will lay eggs in hollow reeds or plant stems, fill them with enough food to feed the larvae and then seal the hole with mud. The eggs should hatch in approximately a week but the adults will not emerge till the following spring. There are several things you can do to encourage these native bees to live in your orchard. The first is provide a suitable nesting location, a bee house can be a cheap option but wash it out periodically to prevent infestation of mites or diseases. Secondly provide pollen sources near the nesting location and finally they need mud available to seal the nesting holes. Mason bees can be wonderful pollinators for your spring blooms and orchard.

**Reminders**

- Sidedress cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower 3 weeks after transplanting. Sidedress onions 2 to 4 weeks after transplanting.
- Do not remove foliage from spring-flowering bulbs until the foliage dies. You need to give time for the foliage to transfer energy to the bulbs.
- Repot houseplants as needed. Go up 1 inch to 2 inches in size of pot.
- Keep newly planted trees & shrubs watered as needed. Keep soil moist but not waterlogged.

**Upcoming Events**

- **May 4, 2022: New and Improved Annual Flower Varieties**
  New and improved varieties of annual flowers hit the garden center shelves every year. Which varieties will provide you outstanding summer performance? Join Matthew McKernan, Sedgwick County Horticulture Extension Agent as he highlights new varieties of annual flowers with outstanding performance, along with tips for growing annual flowers more successfully this summer! For more information on KSRE Garden Hour click here.
- **May 12, 2022: Gardening Basics- Augusta Community Garden (1301 Ohio Street) 6:30 pm**
  Are you a new gardener who is not sure how to get started or are you struggling with your garden? Join us at the Augusta Community Garden for a demonstration of the basics of gardening, how to get started with raised bed gardening, composting and get some of your questions or issues answered. Registration isn’t necessary. Parking is available on 14th Ave.