

## **THE GRAPEVINE**

### **PLANTING ASPARAGUS**

Though it is too early to plant asparagus, it is not too early to make plans and prepare soil. This crop is a perennial and will survive for many years if given proper care. It prefers full sun and a well-drained soil and is usually placed on the edge of the garden area so that there is no need to till around the area to plant other crops. Proper soil prep is especially important for perennial crops. Take a soil test to ensure proper levels of nutrients. Work the soil as early in the spring as possible but do not work wet soil as clods will form. Then add two inches of organic matter to the surface and the fertilizer and work again so the organic matter and fertilizer are blended into the soil. Asparagus can be propagated from seed but is more often started from 1-year-old crowns. These crowns are planted deeply; 6 to 8 inches deep either in a hole for each crown or in a trench with shallower planting recommended for soils with more clay. Space plants 18 to 24 inches apart. Fill in the trench gradually over the growing season to encourage growth. March 15 to April 15 is the best planting time. Adapted varieties include Jersey Giant, Jersey King, Jersey Knight, Jersey Supreme and Purple Passion. These are all male hybrids that will produce three times as much as our old Martha or Mary Washington varieties. Males have a number of advantages over females in that they live longer, emerge earlier in the spring, are more productive and eliminate potential volunteer plants that can reduce the productivity of a planting.

Weed control is very important. Competition with weeds results in slow establishment. A shallow hoeing should be all that is needed.

### ***Soil Testing***

Most gardeners think that soil tests are done only to find out what nutrients are deficient. However, it is just as important to know if you have adequate levels of nutrients so you don't add unneeded fertilizer. The most basic soil test checks pH and the levels of phosphorus and potassium. Most of the lawn and garden soil tests that come out of our soil-testing lab show more than adequate levels of both phosphorus and potassium. If those nutrients are not needed, applying them is a waste of money and can be a source of pollution. In extreme cases, excess phosphorus can interfere with the uptake of micronutrients. So, if you haven't taken a soil test in several years, take one this spring. Begin by taking a representative sample from a number of locations in the garden or lawn. Collect soil from the 4 to 6 inch depth, this is where the majority of the root action of taking up nutrients is done. Mix these together in a clean container and select about 1 to 2 cups to bring in for testing. Take the soil to your local K-State Research and Extension office to have tests done at the K-State soil-testing laboratory for a fee. A soil test determines fertility problems, not other conditions that may exist such as poor drainage, poor soil structure, soil borne diseases or insects, chemical contaminants or damage, or shade with root competition from other plants. All of these conditions may reduce plant performance but cannot be evaluated by a soil test.

### ***Fertilizing Spring-flowering Bulbs***

The best time to fertilize spring-flowering bulbs is when foliage emerges in the spring rather than at flowering. Traditionally, gardeners have applied fertilizer during bloom or a bit after, but because bulb roots start to die at flowering, fertilizer applied at bloom is wasted. Roots are active when the foliage first pokes through the ground. Nutrients applied then help the plant produce flowers the following year. If bulbs have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium in the soil. It is best to use a soil test to be certain. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 lbs. per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 lbs. per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Lawn fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 can be used, but cut the rate by a third. Also make sure the lawn fertilizer does not contain a weed preventer or weed killer. Remember to leave the foliage until it dies naturally. The energy in the foliage goes to the bulb and will help the bloom for the next year.

## ***Gardening Calendar***

The Kansas Healthy Yards website has a gardening calendar that many gardeners find helpful. It lists all the months of the year and the chores that can be done during that month. Each month is divided into separate sections such as Vegetables and Fruits, Flowers, Lawns, Trees and Shrubs and Houseplants. Not all suggestions will be helpful each year but are important to have included. For example, one of the January tips is on removing snow and ice on limbs. You may brush off the snow, if desired, but ice should be allowed to melt naturally.

To find the gardening calendar, go to - <http://kansashealthyyards.org/> - and click on "Gardening Calendar" in the gray bar at the top of the page.

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