

Larry Crouse

Extension Horticulture Agent FRUIT TREE PRUNING WORKSHOP

For those who have fruit trees – or want to have fruit trees – a *free* community workshop on tree pruning will be held at the *Numana Community Garden on Gordy Street, between 6th St. And 9th St. in El Dorado*. The workshop will be held this *Friday, March 3rd, at 10 a.m.* This is a hands on type of exercise, so bring pruning shears with you if you care to do so. Dress appropriately, there will not be a rain-out date. Pruning is essential for a tree to thrive and produce abundant fresh fruit. Participants will learn how to set the base structure of an apple or peach tree and the reasons behind pruning. Participants will want to bring their own pruning tools, bypass pruners are preferred over anvil type. Hand shears and loppers are the tools of choice. The apple orchard used in this workshop is part of the Numana Community Garden. These fruit trees will provide fresh fruit for people in need in our community. There is **no cost** for this tree pruning workshop. Any questions about this event can be answered by calling the Butler County Extension office at **(316) 321-9660**.

Cure the Itch by Planting Peas

If you are tired of winter and hunger for spring, try planting peas as soon as the soil dries and the soil temperature reaches 40 degrees. We have several types of peas we can plant in Kansas. Probably the most common is the shelling pea and the old standard in this group is Little Marvel. Though Little Marvel is still on our recommended list, we have a number of others that do well including Green Arrow, Knight, Maestro, Burpeeana and Mr. Big. All of these are early maturing types that allow us to harvest a crop before the hot weather arrives and stops production. Snow peas are those commonly used in stir-fry that have a crisp edible pod. Recommended varieties include Dwarf Grey Sugar and Mammoth Melting Sugar. Sugar snap peas resemble shelling peas but have a thick, fleshy pod and can be eaten fresh, steamed or cooked. Like snow peas, they are not shelled but eaten pod and all. We recommend Sugar Bon, Sugar Ann, Super Sugar Snap and Sugar Sprint. Peas should be planted shallow, about one-half inch deep, to encourage rapid germination and emergence. Seed in the row should be spaced 2 inches apart. Many people often plant two rows 6 to 8 inches apart so the floppy plants can support one another. For some older varieties, this may not be enough. They may need trellising to support the growing vines.

Lettuce

Though lettuce is most often planted directly from seed in late March to early April, it can be started from transplants. Transplants allow lettuce to mature earlier so that it escapes the excessive heat that can lead to a strong flavor and bitterness. Seed should be started four to five weeks before transplanting. Because transplants are placed at the same time as direct seeding, now would be a good time to begin. Use a seed starting mix and plant shallow as lettuce requires light for germination. A soil media temperature of 60 to 68 degrees will encourage germination. Watch the media temperature carefully, as seed can enter a thermal dormancy if germination temperatures are excessive. Also, a cooler temperature of 55 to 60 degrees should be used once the plants emerge. Time to maturity varies depending on the type of lettuce, with leaf lettuce being the quickest, followed by bibb, romaine, and buttercrunch lettuce. Head or crisphead lettuce is the slowest and is least likely to mature before becoming bitter. Spacing also varies with type. Leaf lettuce plants are spaced 4 to 6 inches apart, buttercrunch, bibb, and romaine are set at 6 to 8 inches and head lettuce should be at least 8 inches apart in the row. Lettuce does not

have an extensive root system and requires regular watering if rainfall is lacking. Fertilize before planting according to soil test. Plants should also be sidedressed when about 1/3 grown. Sidedressing is done with fertilizers that have more nitrogen than phosphorus and potassium. Use 1/3 cup of nitrate of soda (16-0-0) or 1/4 cup of a 27-3-3, 29-5-4 or similar fertilizer per 10 feet of row. The latter fertilizers are lawn fertilizers but will work well for sidedressing as long as they do not contain weed killers or weed preventers.

Soil Temperature and Vegetables

One of the most neglected tools for vegetable gardeners is a soil thermometer. Soil temp is a much better measure of when to plant than air temperature or the calendar. Planting when soil is too cool can cause seeds to rot and transplants to sit there. A number of vegetables can germinate and grow at cool temperatures. For example, peas will germinate and grow well at a soil temperature of 40 F. Though lettuce, parsnips, and spinach can sprout at a soil temperature of 35 F, they prefer at least 45 F for best germination and growth. Radishes also do well at a soil temperature of 45 F. Warm-season crops such as tomatoes, sweet corn and beans prefer at least 55 F for germination (or transplanting), but others such as peppers, cucumbers, melons and sweet potatoes need it even warmer, about 60 F. Taking soil temperature accurately is a bit of a science. First, use a metal soil thermometer, which is sold in many garden, auto parts and hardware stores. Take temperature 2.5 inches deep at about 10 to 11 a.m. Temperature variations throughout the day and night affect soil temperature, with lowest readings after dawn and warmest around mid-afternoon. The late-morning reading gives a good average temperature. If taking the soil temperature at this time is not practical, take a reading before you leave for work and a second when you return home and use the average. Also be sure to get a consistent reading for four to five days in a row before planting, and make sure a cold snap is not predicted.

Forcing Stems of Woody Plants for Indoor Bloom

Stems of a number of woody plants can be forced into bloom for indoor display. Of course, some are easier to force than others. Three of the easiest are forsythia, pussy willow, and flowering quince. These plants have now gone through enough cold weather to satisfy their chilling requirement and should bloom if given the right conditions. Remember that the flower buds on forsythia are killed as temperatures reach -10 degrees F. If your area has had temperatures this far below zero, use one of the other woody plants. Choose a day that is above freezing for collecting branches for blooming. Keep the stem length to 3 feet or less. As you cut, place the stems in a bucket of water. Once you have the number of branches you want, bring them into the house and soak them in warm water for several hours -- a bathtub works well for this. This ensures that the stems and buds are fully hydrated. Next, place them in a container that has a warm, preservative solution and place them in an environment with high humidity and plenty of light. Make your preservative solution by dissolving packets of floral preservative in water. These packets can often be obtained from your local florist. You can also make your own preservative by adding a tablespoon of Listerine per gallon of water, but commercial preservatives are preferred. Floral preservatives accomplish two functions; they prevent bacterial growth in your water and provide nutrients and energy for the life processes of the plants. Normally, forsythia will take about nine days to flower, quince will require between 12 to 20, and pussy willow needs from five to 15 days. The time required will vary depending on indoor conditions and how late in the winter the branches were collected. Most woody plants should be in flower within three weeks of collection and will remain in flower for about a week before blooms start to fade.

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