

HARVESTING SWEET POTATOES

Sweet potatoes should be harvested no later than the first fall freeze because cold temperatures can damage the sensitive roots. However, you may want to harvest earlier if you prefer a smaller sweet potato. Test dig a hill to see if they are the size you want. Sweet potatoes should be cured after being dug. The digging process often damages the tender skin, and curing helps these small wounds heal. Place the roots in a warm, humid location for 5 to 10 days immediately after digging. A location with a temperature around 85 to 90 degrees is ideal. A space heater can be used to heat a small room or other area. Raise the humidity by placing moist towels in the room. The curing process not only heals wounds but also helps convert starches to sugars. This process improves the texture and flavor of the roots. Sweet potatoes should be stored above 55 degrees. Storage at temps below that injures the roots, shortens storage life and gives them an off flavor.

Rotation of Vegetable Crops

Rotating vegetable crops is a standard way of helping prevent disease from being carried over from one year to the next. Rotation means that crops are moved to different areas of the garden each year. Planting the same crop, or a related crop, in the same area each year can lead to a build-up of disease. Also, different crops vary in the depth and density of the root system as well as extract different levels of nutrients. As a rule, cool-season crops such as cabbage, peas, lettuce and onions have relatively sparse, shallow root systems and warm-season crops such as tomatoes, peppers and melons have deeper, better developed root systems. Therefore, it can be helpful to rotate warm-season and cool-season crops. As mentioned earlier, it is also a good idea to avoid planting closely related crops in the same area as diseases may be shared among them. For example, tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and eggplant are closely related. Also, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and brussels sprouts share many characteristics in common. For example, do not plant cabbage where broccoli was the previous year or tomatoes where the peppers were. So, why is this important to bring this up in the fall? Now is the time to make a sketch of your garden so that the layout is not forgotten when it is time to plant next year.

Garden Spiders

People may become concerned when they see a large, noticeable spider setting up shop in or near the garden. These garden spiders feed on insects and are considered beneficial. There are actually two common species of garden spiders in Kansas that are active during the day. The yellow garden spider has a black abdomen with yellow to yellow-orange markings. The black legs have a yellow or reddish band. The banded garden spider has numerous bands on both the abdomen and legs. Those on the abdomen are alternating white and dark bands. The legs have alternating black and orange bands. Both of these spiders are orb weavers that spin large webs with the typical spider web shape. Though these garden spiders have poor eyesight, they are extremely sensitive to vibrations that pass through the web and use this sensitivity to capture their prey. Since these spiders are beneficial and harmless to humans, it is recommended that they be left alone.

Lawn Seeding Deadline Nears

September is the best month to reseed cool-season lawns such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. However, you can get by with an early to mid-October planting for tall fescue. October 15 is generally considered the last day for safely planting or overseeding a tall fescue lawn in the fall. If you do attempt a late seeding, take special care not to allow plants to dry out.

Anything that slows growth will make it less likely that plants will mature enough to survive the winter.

Seedlings done after the cut-off date can be successful, but the success rate goes down the later the planting date. Late plantings that fail are usually not killed by cold temperatures but rather desiccation. The freezing and thawing of soils heave poorly rooted grass plants out of the ground, which then dry and die. Keeping plants watered will help maximize root growth before freezing weather arrives.

Call "Kansas One Call" Before Digging

Most people don't know what is buried under their property. Always call Kansas One Call before planting or setting fence. You may reach them at 811 or <https://www.kansasonecall.com/>. When hand digging, make the hole just deep enough so that the tree sits slightly above nursery level. To determine the depth of the hole, measure the distance from the root flare (point where trunk and roots meet) to the bottom of the root ball. If the flare isn't visible (very common), remove enough soil or media so that it is. The width of the planting hole is also very important. It should be two to three times the width of the root ball. Loosening the soil outside the hole so it is five times the diameter of the root ball will allow the tree to spread its roots faster.

Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Office
206 N. Griffith, Suite A
El Dorado, Kansas 67042