

# THE GRAPEVINE

May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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## MOVING HOUSEPLANTS OUTSIDE FOR THE SUMMER

It is often helpful to set many houseplants outside for the summer so they can recover from the low light levels endured during the winter months. As soon as night temperatures stay consistently above 55 degrees F, houseplants can be moved to their summer home. Choose a spot that has dappled shade, is protected from the wind and is close to water. A porch or a spot that receives shade from trees or buildings will work well. Putting houseplants in full sun will cause the leaves to photo-oxidize or sunburn because the leaves have become adapted to low light levels inside the house. Where possible, sink the pots into the ground to help moderate root temperatures and reduce watering frequency. If you have a number of plants, dig a trench 6 to 8 inches deep (or deeper if you have larger pots) and long enough to accommodate all of your plants without crowding. Place peat moss under and around the pots. Peat moss holds water, helps keep the pots cool and reduces evaporation from clay pots. About every two weeks, rotate the pots a quarter turn to break off any roots that have penetrated the peat moss surrounding the pot and to equalize the light received on all sides of the pot. Water as needed. If the potting soil is dry a half-inch deep in the pot, it's time to water.

### *Rabbits in the Garden*

Rabbits in gardens are a perennial problem because of the wide variety of plants they can feed on. This time of year, they gravitate to young vegetables and flowers. But there are some veggies that are rarely bothered including potatoes, tomatoes, corn, squash, cucumbers, and some peppers. The question is how do you protect other, more susceptible plants? Fencing provides a quick and effective control method. The fence does not need to be tall; 2 feet is sufficient for cottontails. But the mesh must be sufficiently fine (1 inch or less) so young rabbits will not be able to go through it. Support for the fence can be supplied by a number of products, but electric fence posts work well. Often fencing is not an acceptable choice because it affects the attractiveness of the garden.

Another type of barrier is a floating row cover. Though most often used to promote early growth by keeping plants warmer than normal, it can also help protect young plants from insects and wildlife. Other ways to control rabbits including repellents, trapping and shooting. Repellents are often suggested for control but often do not last long and require frequent reapplication. Also, many are poisonous and cannot be used on plants or plant parts destined for human consumption. Live traps can be used to collect and move the rabbits to a rural area several miles from where they were trapped. A number of baits can be used to entice the rabbit to enter the trap including a tightly rolled cabbage leaf held together with a toothpick. However, rabbits often avoid baits if other attractive food is available. Another possibility is to use a motion-activated sprinkler. These are attached to a garden hose and release a short burst of water when motion is detected. Contech, Orbit, and Havahart are suppliers and each is advertised as protecting up to at least 1,000 square feet. Shooting is another possibility when it is safe and legal to do so.

### *Setting out New Vegetable Transplants*

Plants moved directly from a warm, moist greenhouse to the more exposed and cooler conditions outside may undergo transplant shock. Transplant shock causes plants to stop growing for a time. Plants can be acclimated to outside conditions by placing them outdoors in a location protected from wind and full sunlight such as the side of your house for a few days before transplanting. If

you can, check several times during the day to make sure they don't become too dry. The leaves will develop more of a waxy cuticle during the hardening process so that they can better withstand our Kansas winds. New transplants, even those hardened off, may need to be protected from stronger than normal Kansas winds when set out. Wooden shingles placed to block the wind used to be recommended but are now difficult to find. Try a plastic milk jug or a 2-liter soda bottle with both the bottom and top cut off. Push the jug or bottle into the soil far enough so it won't blow away. In windy conditions, it may need to be stabilized with a wooden dowel or metal rod. Remove once the winds subside.

### *Cabbage Worms*

This is the time of year we normally start seeing damage from cabbage worms. The imported cabbage worm is usually the first cabbage worm species to appear and is a fuzzy, elongated green worm. Larvae come from eggs laid by the white butterfly often seen flitting around the plants. Early control is essential to reduce injury. BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) and spinosad (Monterey Garden Insect Spray, Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew) are effective organic products that are labeled for this pest. BT can be found in Dipel, Thuricide and other similar materials. Direct sunlight deactivates BT quickly so it is helpful to spray late in the day or on a cloudy day.

Conventional insecticides such as carbaryl (Sevin), malathion and methoxychlor are also effective but will kill natural enemies of these pests. Be sure to hit the underside of leaves where insects feed. Note that hitting the underside of leaves is easier when using a dust applied with a duster than when using a liquid spray.

### *Anthrachnose on Sycamore, Maple and other Shade Trees*

We are starting to see anthracnose on sycamore. Anthracnose is a fungal disease favored by cool, wet weather. Young leaves may wither and turn black. On older leaves, look for brown areas that follow the major veins of the leaves. In some cases, the petiole (leaf stem) is infected, which causes leaf drop. The leaf may look perfectly fine, so look for browned areas on the petiole.

In severe cases, the tree drops heavily infected leaves and may be completely defoliated. We have had people cut down sycamore trees that have lost all their leaves. DO NOT DO THIS. Healthy trees will leaf out again in a few weeks. Defoliation this early in the year does not affect overall tree health. Trees have plenty of time to produce new leaves and make the energy reserves needed to survive the winter. Other types of trees that are affected by anthracnose include birch, elm, walnut, oak and especially ash. Anthracnose seldom causes significant damage to trees in Kansas, so chemical controls are usually unnecessary. Also, fungicides do not cure infected leaves. Applying fungicides now will not help.

### *'Staggering' Sweet Corn Planting*

Sweet corn is one of those crops that is only "good" for a few days. If you want longer periods of production, consider staggering the planting. Though it is tempting to follow a calendar schedule, such as planting a small block every week, it is better to use crop development as a trigger. If you plant on a calendar schedule, you may have noticed that later plantings often catch up with earlier ones. Instead, plant the next block of when the previous one is one-half to one inch tall.

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