

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

THE GRAPEVINE

March 12th, 2020

Larry Crouse
Extension Horticulture Agent

SEED SWAP THIS SATURDAY!

This Saturday, March 14th, from 10 AM to noon there will be a seed swap for anyone who is interested at the Butler County 4-H / Community Building at 206 N Griffith in El Dorado. Everyone is invited, even if you don't have any seeds to share.

What to bring: Any seeds (2017 or newer please), cuttings to root, tubers/bulbs; Anything garden related - books/magazines, pots, tools; Items made from your garden such as soaps, oils, fruit jams and jelly; No potted plants, please.

Bring 10 take 10, bring 20 take 20. If you have nothing to bring you can still take 5 items.

Please separate seeds into individual packs. You can fold up paper and tape/staple it closed, or use small plastic craft bags. Mark the bag with the seed information. Suggested amounts (remember this is a sample pack): Flowers 10-20 seeds; pepper/tomato type plants 5-6 seeds; cuke/melon/squash 5-6 seeds; greens/root crops 1/8 tsp; beans/peas 20 seeds; corn 25-50 seeds.

So we hope to see you there! This fun event is being co-sponsored by the Augusta Community Garden, the Butler County Garden Gate Garden Club and the Butler County Master Gardeners.

Time to Plant Potatoes

St. Patrick's Day is just around the corner, so it is time to think about getting seed potatoes in the ground. Actually any time from mid- to late-March is fine for potato planting. We may have to plant later this year if soil remains wet. Be sure to buy seed potatoes rather than using those bought for cooking. Seed potatoes are certified disease free and have plenty of starch to sprout as quickly as soil temperatures allow. Most seed potatoes can be cut into four pieces, though large potatoes may yield more, and small less. Each seed piece should be between 1.5 and 2 ounces. Seed pieces this size will have more than one eye. Each pound of potatoes should yield 8 to 10 seed pieces. Cut the seed 2 to 3 days before planting so freshly cut surfaces have a chance to suberize, or toughen, and form a protective coating. Storing seed in a warm location during suberization will speed the process. Plant each seed piece about 1 to 2 inches deep and 8 to 12 inches apart in rows. Though it is important to plant potatoes in March, emergence is slow. It is often mid- to late-April before new plants poke their way through the soil. As the potatoes grow, pull soil up to the base of the plants. New potatoes are borne above the planted seed piece, and it is important to keep sunlight from hitting the new potatoes. Exposed potatoes will turn green and produce a poisonous substance called solanine. Keeping the potatoes covered will prevent this.

If you are planning on planting potatoes for a fall crop, save back some of the seed potatoes for planting in mid-July as it is hard to find seed potatoes during the summer. Store the potatoes in a cool location or in a refrigerator. It is especially important to let the potatoes sit in a protected location for 3 to 4 days after cutting as they tend to rot unless they have a chance to form a protective layer over the cut surface.





Don't Work Wet Soil

Resist the temptation to work any soil if it is wet. Doing so destroys the structure of the soil resulting in clods that may not break down all summer. To determine if a soil is too wet to work, grab a handful and squeeze. If water comes out, it is much too wet. Even if no water drips out, it still may not be dry enough to work. Push a finger into the soil you squeezed. If it crumbles, it is dry enough, but if your finger just leaves an indentation, more time is needed. Be sure to take your handfuls of soil from the depth you plan to work the soil because deeper soils may contain more moisture than the surface. If there is a small area that you wish to plant in a few weeks and it much too wet to work, try tarping the area during wet weather and uncovering when it is dry. This will allow the soil to dry enough to work by the time you are ready to plant.

Bolting and Buttoning in Cole Crop Plants


Broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower are cole crops that have a tendency to bolt (go to seed) or button (produce an extremely small head) if plants are not grown properly. These crops need to be kept actively growing through their production cycle, including growing transplants from seed. If they slow down due to under-fertilization or are stunted due to overgrowing their container, buttoning or bolting is more likely. Therefore, be sure to properly fertilize plants grown from seed and ensure they have enough light. The easiest way to fertilize transplants is to use a potting soil with fertilizer already added. Light may be more of a challenge. Often natural sunlight is not sufficient unless the plants are in a greenhouse. Therefore, additional light is often needed.

If you are not growing your own transplants but rather selecting plants later in the month for transplanting, choose small, stocky, dark green plants. Even after transplanting, these plants need to be well-fertilized. Fertilize at transplanting with a starter solution and continue to fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks until harvest. Both buttoning and bolting are irreversible. Once a seed stalk starts to form, nothing can be done to force the plant to produce a normal crop.

Cut Back Ornamental Grasses

March is a good time to remove dead foliage from ornamental grasses. Grasses green up earlier if foliage is removed and are more attractive without a mixture of dead and live leaves. A number of tools can be used including hand clippers, weed whips (if the foliage is of a small enough diameter), weed whips with a circular blade, or even a chain saw. Use the top of the chainsaw bar to cut so the saw doesn't pull in debris and clog. Also, it is often helpful to tie foliage together before cutting so it doesn't interfere and is easier to dispose of. Burning is another option - but only if it is safe and legal to do so. Note that these grasses may not burn long, but they burn extremely hot. Even so, the crown of the plant is not damaged and new growth appears relatively quickly. If the center of the clump shows little growth, the plant would benefit from division. Dig up the entire clump and separate. Then replant the vigorous growth found on the outer edge of the clump.

Larry E. Crouse
Butler County Horticulture Agent
K-State Research & Extension
206 N Griffith, Suite A
El Dorado, KS 67042
(316)321-9660
lcrouse@ksu.edu



Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, contact Charlene Miller, KSRE - Butler Co. Director, 316-321-9660

