

D's Notes
06/01/26

VIDEO OF THE WEEK:

Garden space is often limited, which can make growing large plants such as cantaloupe and watermelon difficult. Smaller plants typically will produce less fruit per vine, but still produce regular sized fruit. *This week's video discusses the benefits of cantaloupe varieties that will grow well in small spaces*, in order to help maximize your garden's productivity this summer: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/cantaloupe-varieties-for-small-spaces>

GARDEN CALENDAR:

- Treat fruit trees with needed pesticides to control insects and disease.
- Mulch perennial and annual gardens for weed control and moisture retention.
- Reduce thatch layers from Zoysia & Bermuda lawns by verticutting or core aerating.
- Spot treat broadleaf weeds.
- Water young trees and shrubs as needed. Ten gallons of water per 1 inch of trunk diameter is recommended per week.
- Remove tree stakes that have been in place more than one growing season.
- Do not use string trimmers or mowers around the base of trees and shrubs. These tools can cause serious damage to bark. Instead install mulch rings to reduce weeds and buffer plants from equipment.
- Check houseplants for insects.

Heat & Drought Tolerant Annuals For Summer Color:

The Kansas climate throws numerous extremes at our landscape plants. Most Kansas summers are commonly filled with hot, dry conditions, and even periods of drought. With these environmental extremes, it is important to select annual flowers that thrive in hot, dry conditions, in order to bring vibrant color to the landscape while also conserving water. Here are ten suggestions for drought-tolerant annual flowers to plant this summer: Mexican Heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*); Lantana (*Lantana camara*); Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*); Angelonia (*Angelonia angustifolia*); Annual Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*); Ornamental Sweet Potato Vine (*Ipomoea batatas*); Zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolia*); Gomphrena (*Gomphrena* spp.); Tall Verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*); Texas Primrose (*Calylophus hybrid.*)

Be sure to keep in mind that all newly planted annual flowers will require supplemental water to get established. Once plants are well rooted, however, they will require less frequent irrigation. By incorporating drought-tolerant selections into garden beds, containers, and landscapes, gardeners can maintain seasonal beauty while promoting efficient water use and reducing overall maintenance.

Healthy Lawns Are The Best Self Defense Against Weeds:

Keeping weeds out of your home lawn can feel like an ongoing battle. Instead of constantly applying chemical treatments, take a proactive approach to prevent weeds from

growing in the first place. Maintaining a strong, vigorously growing turfgrass will be the best way to crowd out and prevent the invasion weeds in the first place.

Some of the most common reasons why weeds invade home lawns, and how you can avoid each problem, include:

- *Improper mowing.* Mowing too low and too infrequently thins the turf, allowing weeds to get started. Raise mower decks to the appropriate heights, ensure mower blades remain sharp, and never mow when the turf is wet.
- *Improper watering.* Frequent watering encourages weed seed germination, disease, thatch, and shallow-rooted turf that is less competitive with weeds for soil moisture and nutrients. Minimize early spring watering, and only water as needed during the growing season. Water deeply, slowly, and infrequently to encourage deep root growth of turf, and increase its drought tolerance.
- *Improper fertilizing.* Fertilizing too much or too little or at the wrong time may benefit weeds more than grass. Only fertilize during the recommended months, only apply what is needed, and conduct a soil test to better understand fertilizer needs.
- *Compacted soil.* Soil compaction is a hidden stress on the turfgrass root system. The grass is unable to compete effectively with weeds. Core aerate lawns at least once per year to reduce compaction.
- *Excessive wear.* Turf areas used for recreation, sports and pets are subject to wear and compaction. Core aerate to reduce compaction in these areas, and temporarily fence off areas when establishing new grass seed.
- *Wrong kind of grass.* The wrong variety for the location will gradually decline and be invaded by weeds. Always check the grass seed label before purchasing to evaluate the types of grass seeds included in the bag. Purchase only recommended types of turf, avoiding cheap fillers.
- *Environmental stress.* Weeds often take over a lawn after it has been weakened and thinned from weather-related stress. Water appropriately during times of drought and avoid overwatering in the spring and fall. Evaluate irrigation water quality and soil nutrient levels by testing.
- *Thatch.* Excessive thatch causes shallow-rooted grass, limits water infiltration and contributes to insect and disease problems. Regularly monitor thatch accumulation and remove excessive thatch when necessary.

Learn more about the proper care for each type of turfgrass common to Kansas, by visiting the corresponding publication below:

- *Tall Fescue:* https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/tall-fescue-lawns_MF736
- *Kentucky Bluegrass:* https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kentucky-bluegrass-lawns_MF2262.pdf
- *Buffalograss:* https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/buffalograss-lawns_MF658
- *Bermudagrass:* https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/bermudagrass-in-kansas_MF1112.pdf
- *Zoysiagrass:* https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/zoysiagrass-in-kansas_MF683.pdf

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 nighttime temperatures remain consistently above 55°F, houseplants can be moved to their summer home.

Start by locating house plants outside in an area with dense to dappled shade. It will help if the area is also protected from the wind and close to water. A covered porch or a spot that receives shade from trees or buildings will work well.

Avoid putting houseplants in the full sun too quickly. This will cause the leaves to photooxidize or sunburn because the leaves have become adapted to low light levels inside the house. Gradually increase the plant's exposure to sunlight and wind every 10-14 days, until the light levels of their outdoor summer location are matched. Make this transition gradually, over a 4-8 week period, to prevent leaf scorch and leaf drop. Even with the gentlest of transitions, some indoor plants may drop their leaves when moved into a new location. If this occurs, continue normal care, and look for new leaves to emerge in a couple of weeks.

Sinking pots into the ground can help to moderate root temperatures and reduce watering frequency during this transition period. 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 plants as needed. Plants will likely dry out much more quickly outside than indoors, so more frequent watering will likely be needed. If the potting soil is dry a half inch deep in the pot, it is time to water. *Matthew McKernan, Consumer Horticulture Extension Associate*

Tips for Parents: Summer fun for young children

Parents seeking fun activities for their school-aged children during summer break may not need to look any further than the kitchen cabinet.

Think cornstarch, water and liquid food coloring.

"A really easy activity that you can do with young children is make your own chalk paint," said Tristen Cope, a family and youth development agent in K-State Research and Extension's Chisholm Trail District.

Equal parts cornstarch and water, a dab of food coloring, mix it all up in muffin tins or a small cup...easy as that, you've got summertime fun.

"It's a great activity to get outside and play and explore with your kids," Cope said. "You can even do it on your driveway because (the paint) will wash off."

Cope said a series of publications available online from the *K-State Extension bookstore* contains a wealth of simple ideas for parents and kids to play this summer.

The series, titled *Suddenly in Charge*, <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/search?q=Suddenly+in+Charge>, includes 11 titles, each with at-home activities that parents, older children or other caregivers can put together for younger children.

Some examples:

- *Create a 'calm jar.'* Fill a jar three-fourths with water, add clear glue (or corn syrup), and any number of random items – sequins, glitter, butters, food coloring and more. Tighten or tape down the lid and shake the bottle. Watch the items shimmer. “That’s your sense of calming as you maybe think about your next activity or before you get up and go play,” Cope said.
- *Backyard camping.* Set up a tent, cook dinner, build a small campfire, plan smores, bring a flashlight, read a book. Cope says even if you don’t end up sleeping outside, adults and children share a memorable experience being outside.
- *Masking tape freeways.* Use the tap to create lines all around the house, perhaps up and down furniture, across the floor, through the kitchen. Then use whatever toys you have on hand to ride the freeways, or play Follow the Leader.
- *Build an indoor fort.* “I love the magic that happens when you put together your traditional fort,” Cope said. Some use furniture, chairs, part of a bed or table, then spread blankets over the top and lots of pillows inside. “You make it all cozy and comfy,” Cope said. “The opportunities are endless.”
- *Read a book.* Simple, right? But one of the most simple activities is also one of the most beneficial. “Reading with young children is one of the most foundational things you can do as a parent or caregiver,” Cope said. “I think when you have those experiences – whether it’s in a tent or under a tree or inside your pillow fort – you have created a magical moment and are really engaged with your child.”

Cope also encourages parents to include children in preparing and serving meals. Measuring ingredients helps to teach math skills, as well as learning an important life skill. Making cold snacks – such as popsicles, smoothies or frozen fresh fruit – is also a fun activity on hot days.

“I believe it’s so important that we have routines during the summertime,” Cope said. “Children thrive when they have a routine that is set. It doesn’t have to be as structured as what you would have during the school year...but having a routine when you get up in the morning and brushing your teeth and planning some order of events that will happen for that is very helpful in keeping a child on track.”

Should you save trees damaged by storms?

A Kansas State University horticulture expert says not all trees should be salvaged if they were damaged by storms and heavy winds that hit parts of Kansas recently.

From broken branches and dead limbs falling from trees, to entire trees being blown over at ground level, the extent of storm damage on trees can vary. Matt McKernan said landowners should evaluate trees to determine if the main trunk has split, if there is significant bark damage, or if the inner wood or cambium is exposed.

“These trees are not likely to survive,” McKernan said. “Don’t be afraid to remove the entire tree if severe damage occurred, as these trees pose future safety risks.”

Damaged trees may put on new growth, but McKernan notes that under such extreme stress they are much more susceptible to diseases, pests, and future branch breakage. These issues can create dangerous situations due to increased risk of further breaks.

“If the tree has so many broken limbs that the overall structure is altered, the tree may also be better off being replaced,” McKernan added. “Tree damage can often look worse than

it is, so start by removing small debris from the area as you evaluate injury to the tree. If less than 50% of the overall tree is damaged, proper pruning and care can likely help save the tree.”

For trees with less damage, McKernan offers tips to help them heal:

- Prune broken branches to the next larger branch or the trunk. Do not cut flush with the trunk, but rather to the collar area between the branch and the trunk. “Cutting flush to the trunk creates a larger wound that takes longer to heal,” he said.
- Cut back large limbs progressively. The first cut should be made on the underside of the branch about 15 inches away from the trunk. This cut should be about one-third of the way up through the underside of the limb to prevent bark peeling when the weight of the branch is removed.
- The second cut should be made a few inches out past the first cut, further away from the trunk of the tree. The second cut will begin on the top side of the branch and cut all the way through the branch, removing the weight of the limb.
- A third and final cut should be made at the correct pruning point, just outside the branch collar, removing the remaining stub.

“It is important to be safe during the cleanup process,” McKernan said. He recommends always checking for downed power lines before starting cleanup efforts, as well as looking for broken branches that are still hanging in the tree canopy.

“If the tree is too big or the damage is too extensive, consult an expert,” McKernan said. “Look for an arborist who is both certified and insured.”

Arborists can be certified through either the *Kansas Arborists Association*, <https://www.kansasarborist.com/find-an-arborist.html>, or the *International Society of Arboriculture*, <https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist>.

K-State horticulture expert shares tips for planting warm season vegetables

Warmer temperatures in Kansas mean it’s time for gardeners to begin planting warm-season vegetables. There are exceptions, however.

“Winter squash and pumpkins should be delayed until mid- to late-June,” said Kansas State University horticulture expert Matthew McKernan. “This will help protect plants from one of their biggest pests, the squash bug.”

McKernan said the first generation of squash bugs is active in July. Delaying the planting date for squash will result in younger plants that can escape this round of squash bug damage.

“Plants will still need protection from the second generation of squash bugs, which are present in August,” he said.

Protecting plants from squash bugs requires implementing a wide variety of strategies, including frequent scouting for eggs and nymphs, hand picking when insects are present, and removing plant debris from the garden at the end of the growing season.

If these options still aren’t sufficient, the use of insecticides may also help control squash bugs.

“For small gardens, with only a few plants, floating row covers may be an effective alternative to insecticides,” McKernan said. “Using fabric coverings, suspended over plants as they grow, restricts squash bugs from being able to reach plants and cause damage. Just

keep in mind that covers will need to be removed during flowering to allow bees to pollinate flowers for fruit set.”

More information on squash bugs is online at <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Squash%20Bug.pdf>,

McKernan reminded gardeners that young plants need protection from the wind.

“As you move seedlings into the garden, remember to harden them off by exposing them to the elements gradually,” he said. “Strong winds, intense sunlight, and hot temperatures are all extremes that plants must acclimate to in order to survive.”

“In small scale gardens you can create a windbreak to protect young transplants, but this is not always practical on a large scale.”

“While it may be best to wait on planting squash and pumpkin, we have reached the time of year most other warm season vegetables can be safely planted,” McKernan added.

Tomatoes can be transplanted when the soil temperature is 55°F. Peppers, cucumbers, melons and squash should be planted when the soil temperature is at least 60°F.

“Our soil temperature in Kansas is high enough now that it is safe to plant most warm-season crops,” McKernan said.

Rabbits in the garden?

Rabbits are a common invader of home gardens, especially when plants flower in spring. Kansas State University horticulture expert Matt McKernan said there are many common-sense ways to keep the hungry critters out.

“This time of year, rabbits gravitate to young vegetables and flowers,” McKernan said. “But there are some vegetables that are rarely bothered, including potatoes, tomatoes, corn, squash, cucumbers and some peppers.”

Matt McKernan said some methods for keeping rabbits away include:

Fencing

Fencing is often the quickest and easiest method of control. McKernan recommended the fence be at least two feet tall with a fine mesh of one inch or less. Fencing support can be provided by a variety of products, including electric fence posts. However, fencing may not be a viable choice based on the desired appearance of the garden.

Floating Row Cover

Floating row cover is a light woven material that can be placed over plants yet still allows light, water and air to come through.

“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,” McKernan said.

Repellants

Although commonly suggested for rabbit control, repellants must be re-applied frequently. Some can also be poisonous and cannot be used on plants intended for human consumption, McKernan warned.

Trapping

McKernan said live traps are usually recommended when the rabbit can be moved to a rural area several miles away from where they were initially caught.

“A number of baits can be used to entice the rabbit to enter the trap, including a tightly rolled cabbage leaf held together by a toothpick. However, rabbits often avoid baits if other attractive food is available.”

Sprinkler

A motion-activated sprinkler can be attached to a garden hose, releasing a short burst of water upon motion. McKernan suggests picking a product that advertises it can protect at least 1000 square feet: “Such products are available from Contech, Orbit and Havahart,” he said.

Brand names mentioned in this article are for identification purposes only and are not intended to be an endorsement of any product.