SPRING PLANTING IS UNDERWAY

It seems everyone waits just before planting their garden to take a soil test. Did you know the best time to take a soil test is in the fall after you have cleared off your garden? Fall is recommended because most fertilizers and lime applied to gardens are in granular form and it can take up to six weeks for it to work into the soil. If you apply recommended nutrients in the fall, they have all winter to work in, making it ready for planting in the spring. If you apply recommended nutrients in the spring, then plant, it may be mid-summer before the nutrients take effect. By then, cool-season crops will be finished and you may already be harvesting some of the warm-season vegetables.

By now you should have cool-season plants in the ground. This includes lettuce, spinach, kale, peas, radishes, carrots, potatoes, onion, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kohrabi, and any other cool-season vegetables. Waiting much past early April does not allow these crops enough time to grow and produce before hot weather sets in, which in some years is mid-May. Cool-season vegetables are planted in mid to late March and harvested from late April through early June. At that time they can be removed and replaced with warm-season crops like squash, green beans, tomatoes, peppers and any other warm-season crop you choose to grow. I leave my broccoli plants in the garden all season. After harvesting a large head in mid or late May, they keep producing side shoots all season long. I pick broccoli until a hard freeze in the fall. Broccoli can be blanched and frozen for use during the winter months.

April is the time to plant strawberry plants if you want to start a new bed. Bundles of 10 are often available at garden centers or plants can be purchased in containers. I usually buy the bundles which are typically dormant, but grow quickly soon after planting. This is also the time to plant fruit trees. Fruit trees are available at local nurseries and garden centers. I recently purchased some elderberry plants and a fig tree. As some of you know, I got into elderberries last summer, picking wild ones along roadsides in Adair County. Those of us that picked them
and used the juice over the winter, saw the health benefits they provide. I found the elderberry plants and fig tree at Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company when I visited them in March. Fresh figs are delicious and also make good jam.

Tropical plants like the hibiscus that you may have overwintered indoors, can be moved outside as long as temperatures stay above freezing. They can be repotted with fresh soil if needed. If you are anxious to plant flowers, pansies, snapdragons and dianthus are good choices for spring color. They like cool weather but may need to be replaced once hot weather sets in. Pansies typically don’t last past mid-June. Plant them directly into the garden or containers. If using the same containers as last year, replenish the soil by adding some fresh bagged soil to it and work it in. I use a light, fluffy potting medium and mix it with bagged topsoil. Never use straight topsoil. It is heavy, and there is not enough organic matter or nutrients in it. After each rain or when you water, the soil will crust over. By mixing a potting medium with it, you will loosen the soil, providing better drainage and allowing more oxygen to get to the roots of the plants.

Pines: Pines, for the most part, used to make up our evergreen forest in the area. That is, until needle diseases, nematodes and environmental conditions wreaked havoc. Because of these problems Extension does not recommend planting Austrian and Scotch pine. White pine is not tolerant of uneven moisture, poor soil conditions and other stresses. Now that pine trees are not recommended what are our options? This is a commonly asked question. It does have an easy answer, but most people do not like their choices. The following is a listing of recommended evergreens for the area. Remember, when it comes to evergreen selection the best choice may not be what your favorite tree is, but picking the one that will thrive in the location and the care it will receive. The old saying, “right plant, right place” is the mantra for success with evergreens.

Junipers: Let’s just address this right up front; yes I agree, junipers do not have the classic look and feel of the desired evergreen. Remember though, it is all about right plant in the right place. Junipers are the closest to a native evergreen. With that in mind, this plant is better able than any other to withstand the harsh plain’s conditions. It suffers from very few serious insect and disease problems. Junipers are best able to withstand poor conditions, uneven moisture conditions and locations that will not be watered. The plant is tough as nails. Translated this means it is the go-to evergreen in many areas. There are several upright tree forms that do have a nice habit and look in the landscape. These include ‘Canaerti,’ ‘Spartan,’ ‘Keteleeri’ and, for very narrow locations, ‘Taylor’. These cultivars are great for groupings to create screens and block the wind. Once established they can even thrive on very little or no supplemental irrigation. No other evergreen will be able to do that. So get over the fact that the cousins of these selections grow like weeds in the ditches. Junipers deserve more attention in the landscape, as they are the best all-around evergreen choice.

Arborvitae: Small arborvitaes have been planted around entrances and foundations of many homes for generations. A newer intro-
The Spring Forward into Gardening workshop will take place Saturday, April 18, from 9:00-3:30 at William Matthew Middle School in Kirksville. From 9-9:30 visit several plant vendors and table displays. You will have the opportunity to purchase plants and large livestock mineral tub containers.

At 9:30, Chef Andrea Greer with Morrison Healthcare at Northeast Regional Medical Center will open the workshop with a keynote presentation. She will do some cooking demonstrations with possible sampling of the dishes afterwards. Break-out sessions will follow at 10:50. The morning sessions include Natives, Invasives and Pollinators, Container Gardening, DIY Garden Projects (rain barrels, glass garden art, terrariums and containers), and amazing journeys: the annual spring and fall migrations.

Lunch will be at noon and will be boxed lunches from Hy-Vee. There will also be an opportunity to visit the vendors again.

There will be two break-out sessions in the afternoon of which you can attend two: selecting trees and shrubs for your landscape, raised beds and straw bale gardening, food labeling, container gardening, and amazing journeys: the annual spring and fall migrations. The workshop will be finished at 3:30.

To register call the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866 and request a registration form or download one from our website at http://extension.missouri.edu/adair. The deadline to register is April 13.

William Matthew Middle School is located at 1515 S. Cottage Grove in Kirksville. If coming north on highway 63, take the downtown/Baltimore street exit. Stay on Baltimore street to Patterson. Turn right onto Patterson and then right onto Cottage Grove. You will see the school on your left. Coming south on highway 63, take Baltimore street to Patterson and turn left, then follow above directions.

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production is now recommended as a larger evergreen for the landscape. The recommended selection is ‘Green Giant’ arborvitae. ‘Green Giant’ is a fairly fast grower that has a very pyramidal growth habit. The foliage is a rich green in the summer that slightly yellows in the winter. Some report the tree to be deer resistant and free from bagworms. I would say the jury is still out on this claim. ‘Green Giant’ can reach a height of 30 feet and spread maybe 15 feet wide, helping to make it a good fit for many smaller landscapes. Do not confuse this species with the smaller ornamental arborvitae common on the market, ‘Emerald’ and ‘Degroot’s Spire’, as these are smaller and narrow selections that work best in landscape beds or as a small screen around the patio. ‘Green Giant’ has fair drought tolerances but did suffer in the summer of 2012. Supplemental moisture would be needed to keep the plant healthy during more severe conditions.

Spruce: The poster child for beautiful evergreens would be a spruce of some type, whether one of the green foliage types or the Colorado blue spruce. The problem with spruce is that it is not totally adapted to our climates. The same weather patterns that can kill a pine can also take out a spruce. Spruce, as a rule of thumb, prefers to grow in soils that have even moisture. Spruce will not tolerate even a slight drought. Site selection and proper maintenance is the key to good spruce growth. That means that spruces should only be planted in well-drained soil locations and in areas that can be watered. This also implies that you will water the tree, even with a mild drought. This watering is for the entire life of the tree, not just the first few years of establishment. There are a number of spruces that can be planted in our area. The most popular is the Colorado blue spruce. My recommendation would be to plant Norway spruce species over the blue spruce. Drive around old neighborhoods and you will see more mature Norway spruce. That tells me they are more adaptable. Spruces are best used as landscape trees, either as a specimen or a screen. Situating them in the landscape should make watering easier. Spruce should be planted with caution in open areas, as the heat and drought could cause problems.

There are other species of evergreens on the market, but for the most part these should only be planted as specimen trees and provided with all the tender loving care they need to thrive.

Which evergreen tree to plant should be carefully considered. It is not a snap decision, but one that should be made based only on location, long-term maintenance and the function of the tree. Picking the most beautiful tree does not enter the equation for long-term success. That is unless you know what requirements it takes to make it a lasting addition to the landscape.
GARDEN TIPS FOR APRIL

VEGETABLES:
- Start cucumber, cantaloupe, summer squash, and watermelon seeds indoors in peat pots.
- Finish sowing seeds of cool-season vegetables not yet planted outdoors.
- Remove flower stalks removed from rhubarb plants if they develop.

ORNAMENTALS

WEEKS 1-3:
- Winter mulches should be removed from roses.
- Shrubs and trees best planted or transplanted in the spring include butterfly bush, dogwood, Rose-of-Sharon, Black Gum, redbud, grapes, magnolia, tulip poplar, birch, gingko, hawthorn, and most oaks.
- Fertilize established roses once new growth is 2 inches long. Begin spraying for black spot disease.

WEEK 4:
- Easter lilies past blooming can be planted outdoors. Set the bulbs 2-3 inches deeper than they grew in the pot.
- Apply controls for holly leaf minor when the new leaves are just beginning to grow.
- Evergreen and deciduous hedges may be sheared. Prune the top narrower than the base so sunlight will reach the lower limbs.
- Prune spring flowering ornamentals after they finish blooming.

FRUIT-ALL MONTH:
- Blemish-free fruits that are unmarred by insect or disease injury can rarely be produced without relying on regular applications of insecticides and fungicides. For specific information, see MU Extension publication G6010, Home Fruit Spray Schedule.
- Plant bare-root or potted fruit trees as soon as the soil can be worked.
- Remove tree wraps from trees now.
- Prune peaches and nectarines now.
- Leaf rollers are active on apple trees. Control as needed.
- Stink bugs and tarnished plant bugs become active on peaches.
- Destroy and prune off webs of eastern tent caterpillar.
- Protect bees and other pollinating insects. Do not spray insecticides on fruit trees that are blooming.
- Begin sprays for fireblight susceptible apples and pears using an agricultural streptomycin.
- Spider mites and codling moths become active on apples.

LAWN & TURF
- Start mowing cool season grasses at recommended heights.
- Aerate turf if thatch is heavy or if soil is compacted.
- Top dress low spots and finish over-seeding thin or bare patches.
- Apply crabgrass preventers before April 15. Do not apply to areas that will be seeded.

MISCELLANEOUS:
- Termites begin swarming. Termites can be distinguished from ants by their thick waists and straight antennae. Ants have slender waists and elbowed antennae.
- Mole young are born in chambers deep underground.
- Honeybees are swarming. Wasp and hornet queens begin nesting.
- Hummingbirds return from their winter home in Central America.

GARDEN TIPS FOR APRIL

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 11: Native Plant Sale, Bradford Research Center, 4968 Rangeline Rd., Columbia. Bird watching tour at 7 am, educational talks on native plants at 10:30. For more information call 573-884-7945 or bradford.cafnr.org

April 18: Spring Forward Into Gardening, see page 3

May 1 & 2: Magic City Master Gardener Plant Sale, James Youth Building, Rothwell Park May 1 from 4-7 pm and May 2 from 9-1.

May 2: Opening day of Kirksville Farmers’ Market, west side of Kirksville square, 7-12.

May 23: Kirksville Area Master Gardener Plant Sale at the Farmers’ Market.

June 1: Garden n’ Grow starts in Kirksville. Registration forms will be sent home in May with kids in Adair County public schools, Mary Immaculate and Faith Lutheran. Call the extension office 660-665-9866 if you need a form.

August 2015: Master Gardener training in Kirksville; I’m still trying to figure out what day of the week is going to work best. Right now it looks like Wednesdays from 1:00-4:00 pm. If interested in MG training contact me. We must have 10 to have a class. Master Gardener training is also offered online each semester. The next class will be offered in the September. Sign up on the state Master Gardener homepage at http://mg.missouri.edu/

September 11-13: State Master Gardener Conference, Stoney Creek Inn, Columbia.

-MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN-