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If you need this newsletter in alternative format, please contact Jennifer Schutter at the Adair County Extension Center.

SPRING LAWN CARE

When caring for your lawn and trying to keep it 'weed-free' the saying that "the best defense is a good offense" holds true. Weeds are opportunistic and invade weakened lawns, thus the best weapon to fight weeds is a dense, healthy stand of grass. There are several good management practices that give lawns a fighting chance against weeds, such as planting the appropriate grass for a particular location, re-seeding bare areas in the fall (small areas can be reseeded in the spring), proper fertilizing, proper mowing (three to four inches tall) and proper watering. The height of mowing influences competition against weeds such as crabgrass, the higher the cut the lower the crabgrass infestation. Spring watering should not be a frequent practice if we have normal spring rains. Frequent light sprinkling encourages shallow-rooted weed seed germination.



Crabgrass is a summer annual grassy weed. It is a coarse, textured grass that germinates in the spring and grows well throughout the heat of the summer. Its wide leaf blades, heat tolerance, and prostrate growth habit make it an eyesore in the lawn and allow it to smother desirable turfgrasses. During the summer crabgrass will produce seed heads even at low mowing heights. Crabgrass plants will be killed by the first hard frost in the fall, and will drop their seed heads. In the spring, new crabgrass seedlings emerge around the previous year's plants, unless this open space was over-seeded in the fall with a desired turfgrass or a pre-emergent herbicide is applied this spring.

Crabgrass may begin to germinate when daily high temperatures begin to reach 70°F or above. Most pre-emergent herbicides will not kill crabgrass that has already emerged. They must be applied and watered in to develop that herbicide barrier before weed seed germination. Many effective products are available, almost all of which are combinations of fertilizer with the pre-emergent herbicide (or crabgrass preventer). Always read the label directions carefully when applying lawn care products. Do not over apply, either by excessive overlapping or applying more product than recommended to a specific area. Applying too much product could result in damage to turfgrass roots or other non-target plants.

Start the lawn mowing season with a sharp mower blade. A clean cut will give a more attractive lawn plus reduce incidence of disease. Mow grass

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as needed and at recommended heights. Cool season grasses such as tall fescue, fine fescue or bluegrass prefer a cutting height of about three inches. The taller grass will help with weed control and encourage better root development of your lawn.

If you fertilized your lawn in November, additional fertilizer should not be needed until May. Over fertilization in early spring encourages rapid grass growth thus more frequent mowing and makes the grass more susceptible to leaf diseases. Proper use of pesticides, fertilizers and water are essential for a healthy, attractive lawn. When used incorrectly, these same materials adversely impact surface and ground water quality. It is recommended that you use the "best management practices" to reduce or minimize environmental pollution.

Source: <http://ipm.missouri.edu/MEG/2012/3/Spring-Lawn-Care-Aeration-Fertility-and-Crabgrass-Control/>

good yields of large, bright red tomatoes that has the appearance of a hollow bell pepper. It can be stuffed with salads or bake like stuffed peppers. I like this one for stuffing with tuna or chicken salad. It is a gourmet variety that has very few seeds. You probably won't find it in a garden center and will have to purchase it from a local grower/greenhouse or start seed purchased from an heirloom seed company.

'Cherokee Purple' is one I grow for the flavor. It's indeterminate and produces fruits until a frost kills the vine. It is prone to disease. I also like 'Black Cherry' heirloom tomatoes.

'Fourth of July' is a variety I grew for the first time last year. I planted it in early May and picked the first ripe fruits from it on July 3, just in time for my Fourth of July family barbeque. The fruits are small to medium in size. The plant is indeterminate and will produce until a hard frost.

'Early Girl' is a variety I grow to have early tomatoes. This one will also produce by July 4th, if planted in early May. It is indeterminate.

'Beefsteak' tomatoes have meaty flesh and numerous seeds. There are many varieties available with different sized fruit, harvest times and growing ranges. Most of the beefsteak tomato varieties require a growing season of at least 85 days to harvest. They are large, juicy tomatoes perfect for eating fresh.

'Big Beef' is a hybrid tomato that I have grown and like. The large fruit has old-time tomato flavor and the vines are resistant to many of the problems that can discourage gardeners. The fruit is borne on vigorous, indeterminate vines from summer until frost. Compared to other beefsteak types, Big Beef is early and will set fruit reliably even in cool, wet weather.

All of the varieties I mentioned can usually be purchased from local growers/greenhouses. It may be harder to find them at retail garden centers. I encourage you to try new varieties and find the ones that you like.

FAVORITE TOMATO VARIETIES

By May, most gardeners will be selecting and planting tomato plants. Some of you will wander around the garden center or a local greenhouse trying to decide which varieties you should grow this year. Over the years, variety selection has gotten easier for me. I've tried a lot of varieties, both hybrid and heirloom. From time to time I get asked "what are your favorite tomato varieties?" I really don't have favorites, but there are varieties I like to plant for their various qualities.

In recent years, I've planted the hybrid 'Sun Sugar' cherry tomato. One healthy plant is capable of producing hundreds of tomato fruits. Several years ago, Sun Sugar was named by Sunset magazine as the best tasting tomato in their trials for its sweetness and rich tomato flavor that includes just the right amount of tartness. This disease-resistant plant is one of the very best cherry tomatoes and is easy to grow. The fruits are fantastic for salads or to just set out in bowls for snacking. It matures in 75 days and the plant is indeterminate, which means it will produce flowers and fruit until frost. It should be picked when tomatoes are dark yellow to orange in color for best flavor.



'Sun Gold' is another good one to try. This is the classic for cherry tomato lovers because it offers both remarkable sweet, tangy, delicious tomato flavor. It has golden-orange fruits, and taste best when growing conditions are slightly dry. It is indeterminate.

An heirloom I was introduced to a few years ago by a friend is the 'Burgess Stuffing' Tomato. It matures in 78 days and produces

EASTERN TENT CATERPILLAR

Have you ever noticed webbing in your trees in the spring? If so, it is an insect defoliator called the Eastern Tent Caterpillar. This caterpillar is a native defoliator that occurs as far west as the Rocky Mountains. Its preferred hosts are wild cherry, apple and crabapple, but it will occasionally feed on forest and ornamental trees such as ash, birch, maple, oak, poplar, cherry and plum.

The adult moth looks stout-bodied, is reddish-brown and 0.5 to 0.75 inch long, and has a wingspan of about 1 to 2 inches. During late summer, the adult female will lay 200 to 300 eggs in bands around small twigs on the host tree. The eggs are held in place and covered by a substance that appears varnish-like. The eggs do not hatch until the next spring, about the time the buds of the host tree begin to break open.

Upon emerging, the young caterpillars migrate to a nearby fork on the tree and spin a thick web nest or "tent" where they live together. As the larvae grow, the webbed nest is enlarged. During the day, the larvae leave the nest to feed on the foliage. As it leaves the nest, each larva will spin a strand of silk as it travels, perhaps to help find its way back to the nest. The larvae remain in the nest during the night and on cloudy days.

The mature larva is about 2 inches long and generally dark in color. It has a dark-colored head and a white stripe running down the center of the back. On each side of the white stripe, down both sides of the body, are lengthwise yellow lines. Between the yellow lines is a series of blue markings, with a black spot in front of each blue spot. The body is sparsely covered with fine light brown hairs.

When mature, a larva will leave the nest and search for a protected place where it spins a rather large, thick, white cocoon around itself to pupate. These cocoons can be found on the sides of trees, among the debris on the ground, on brush and weeds, fences and even on sides of buildings. There is a single generation each year.

Control methods include tearing web nests out of trees and allowing caterpillars to fall to the ground where they can be eaten by natural predators like birds. Chemical spraying is usually not necessary.

Source: MU Guide 7271, Insect Defoliators of Missouri Trees: Web producers, <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G7271>.



**National
Gardening
Month**



APRIL IS NATIONAL GARDEN MONTH, SO GET GROWING!

Truman State University students will begin their month long campaign to promote National Garden Month in April. This April will mark the second year since the month was officially deemed National Garden Month by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and the students have been inspired by this official declaration.

April is a great month to start gardening because of the generous rains and ample sunlight that springtime provides here in northeast Missouri. The TSU students have cumulated a multitude of fresh ideas and organized a number of ways they will actively promote the health, therapeutic, and cost-saving benefits associated with gardening on campus and in the community.

The first big event will be a free gardening class on April 6 from 3:30-5:00 pm at the Truman State University Farm on Boundary Street in Kirksville. The class will be taught by Jennifer Schutter, horticulture specialist for University of Missouri Extension in Adair County. All who attend will receive a free giveaway. For more information or to RSVP, please contact Brian Scheurer at bss4231@truman.edu by April 5.

Sustainability is a major 'buzz' word that is regularly taught in academia, and incorporated into present-day strategies of businesses in all industries. However, this emerging idea of being green is not limited to the latter areas and you can certainly learn and develop your own unique, individual sustainable living practices that fit your lifestyle. Being able to cultivate your own food and provide for yourself and your family is a vital life skill to acquire. Everyone should put forth at least some effort in building these skills, and we are sure that your efforts will not go in vain. Thus, it is never too late to pick up gardening as a healthy hobby.

GARDEN TIPS FOR APRIL

VEGETABLES:

- Start cucumber, cantaloupe, summer squash and watermelon seeds indoors in peat pots.
- Finish sowing seeds of all cool-season vegetables not yet planted outdoors.
- Flower stalks should be 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, ginkgo, 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 guidesheet 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.
- Topdress 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.

-MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN-

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 5: Salt River Master Gardener meeting, 7 p.m. at Prairie's Edge, Bowling Green, MO. To carpool, meet at the Hannibal Inn parking lot at 6:15 p.m. We will tour the greenhouses and gift shop for an enjoyable experience. Everyone is welcome to attend, please bring friends.

April 6: Starting a Vegetable Garden, TSU farm, 3:30 to 5 p.m.

May 7: Magic City Master Gardener Plant Sale, 9-2, Rothwell Park Youth Building in Moberly

May 7: Opening day of Kirksville Farmers' Market, west side of Kirksville square, 7 a.m. to 12 p.m..

June-August: Garden n' Grow youth garden program, for children ages 9-13, Mondays and Thursdays, Kirksville. Call Adair County Extension Office at 660-665-9866 if interested.

June 1: Advanced Beekeeping Workshop, Vo-Tech School, Macon, 9-4. Registration forms will be available in early May.

August 25-November 11: Master Gardener training in Macon, Thursdays. Time TBD. If you have a preference on time please contact me. Choices are 9:30-12:30, 12:30-3:30 or 1-4. You can also enroll for online training in late summer.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
 Extension *Garden Talk!*

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