PREPARING THE GARDEN FOR SPRING

As the days get longer and the weather starts to warm, gardeners are anxious to get back into the garden. One of the first things to do in the garden and landscape, is winter cleanup. Rake the lawn to get rid of dead growth, leaves, twigs and other debris. This lets light and air into the soil, encouraging the grass to grow. Rake out and clean-up garden beds to remove leaves and dead plants. Doing so will help dry out and warm the soil faster allowing for early plantings of flowers like pansies, snapdragons or vegetables like lettuce and spinach.

Wraps need to be taken off trees that were wrapped in the fall for winter protection. Leaving it on can damage the trunk by allowing insects and rain to get inside. As weeds start to grow in the garden, remove while roots are still shallow and easy to pull. Chickweed and henbit are two of the earliest weeds to emerge, often in late February and early March. Pre-emergent weed control like PREEN™ containing the active ingredient, trifluralin, can be broadcast over garden beds to prevent germination of these early weeds. Do not plant seeds in these beds for at least six weeks, as trifluralin kills all seeds.

Prune fruit trees and small fruit plants like grapevines, blueberry shrubs and brambles now. Pruning should be completed in northeast Missouri by late March. Apply dormant oil spray to fruit trees, magnolias, crabapples and shrubs such as euonymus to control scale insects and other overwintering pests. Apply dormant oil when the buds are swelling but the leaves haven’t opened yet and when temperatures are between 40-70° Fahrenheit. Apply a fungicide containing chlorothalonil to peach trees before bud swell to prevent Peach Leaf Curl.

Do not be in a hurry to remove winter mulch or cut back perennials until temperatures are reliably warm. Roses uncovered too early can be damaged from the cold. Strawberry plants may experience a crop loss due to freezing temperatures. Typically, early to mid-April is when these plants should be uncovered. If freeze and thaw cycles over the winter heaved plants out of the ground, replant them when the ground thaws and the temperatures stay above freezing.

Resist the urge to start working the garden or flower beds too early. Soil structure can be damaged from working wet soil. When a handful of soil is picked up, it should fall apart, not stick together like glue. When gardens beds have dried out, start working them by adding compost like decomposed manure, in preparation for planting. In late March, seeds of cool-season vegetable crops like lettuce, spinach, collards, cilantro, kale, peas and radish can be planted. Because March can be wet, raised beds and containers work well for these early crops, that prefer cool weather and grow best when temperatures are below 70°

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degrees. Most radishes will be ready for harvest in 30-35 days. Cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi and Brussels sprouts should also be planted at this time. Broccoli and cauliflower planted too late in the spring will not produce. If planted in late March or the first week of April, expect to harvest a nice head of broccoli and cauliflower by late May or the first week of June.

Now is a good time to sharpen mower blades and give the mower and tiller a tune-up. Start preparing other tools for planting. Tighten loose screws, remove rust, and apply oil to wood handles for protection from the elements. Taking proper care of tools will make them last a long time.

GREEN FLOWERS AND PLANTS FOR ST. PATRICK’S DAY

Flowers that come in green are not that common. Most flowers come in bright colors, distinct from stems and have petals that attract pollinators. Green flowers blend in with the foliage. However, there are some that have naturally green flowers and some that have been cultivated for the hue. These include ‘Jade’ rose, ‘Emerald’ rose, ‘Green Envy’ echinacea and ‘Lime Sorbet’ columbine.

Green carnations are a popular choice for St. Patrick’s Day. Some carnations are dyed to get the color desired. The world’s biggest producer of carnations is Colombia, South America. St. Patrick’s Day floral arrangements often contain some of these flowers, as well as foliage plants like shamrocks.

The shamrock is the most used plant to represent Ireland and with great reason as well. Each leaf of the clover represents something: the first is for hope, the second is for faith, and the third is for love. If there is a fourth leaf found, it is for luck. Specialists claim there are about 10,000 three-leaf clovers for every four-leaf clover.

Bells of Ireland flowers, also called “shell flowers,” are used in St. Patrick’s Day arrangements and are popular in bridal arrangements. They are known for their spicy/peppery scent and symbolize good luck. Surprisingly, despite their name, these flowers are actually native to western Asia not Ireland.

GRANT AIMS TO IMPROVE LAVENDER GROWING IN MISSOURI

By: Linda Geist, Writer, MU Extension

Missourians may learn more about lavender thanks to a grant to University of Missouri Extension from the Missouri Department of Agriculture. The $39,274 grant will determine standardized growing practices for lavender in Missouri. It is one of four grants recently awarded by the Missouri Department of Agriculture to MU Extension. Federal funding comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

MU Extension horticulturist Kelly McGowan will lead the research on standardized growing practices such as plant establishment and soil preparation, winter protection, cultivar selection, plant phenology, insect and disease issues, optimal flower and oil production parameters, and fertilization.

Native to the Mediterranean, lavender is in the mint family. Plants grow about 1-2 feet tall. Dense hairs coat its pale green leaves to give it its trademark silvery luster. The light purple lavender flowers are tiny and arranged in spikes. Every part of the lavender plant contains the oil that produces a sweet fragrance. Lavender oil is used for balms, perfumes and cosmetics. It is also used in cooking and medicines.

While lavender can be difficult to grow in Missouri because of winter stress and high summer humidity, McGowan says it offers opportunities in agritourism. Farm-to-table establishments with outside dining could plant pungent lavender fields to enhance the dining experience, she says. McGowan hopes the grant will help researchers find ways to increase its use in essential oils, dried arrangements and commercial operations.

Note: This project will be conducted at four sites in Missouri. Jennifer Schutter will coordinate the project at the Adair County Extension Center in Kirksville starting in the summer of 2021. A field day will be held at some point to allow the public to see the lavender beds, and learn what varieties grew best, and how to use or market lavender.
VIVIPARY, MORE COMMON THAN YOU THINK

Last fall I wrote an article about a phenomenon that occurs in plants called fascination. There is another plant phenomenon to be aware of, and that is vivipary. Vivipary involves seeds germinating prematurely while they are still inside or attached to the parent plant or fruit. It occurs more often than you might think. This phenomenon occurs frequently on ears of corn, peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, pears and citrus fruits.

Vivipary is most likely to be encountered in tomatoes or peppers that have been bought from a grocery store, especially if the fruit has been sitting on the counter for a while in hot weather. You might be surprised to cut it open and find tender white sprouts inside. In tomatoes, the sprouts appear as tiny, white and worm-like, but in peppers they are often thick and sturdy.

Seeds contain a hormone that repress the germination process. This is a necessity, as it keeps the seeds from germinating when conditions aren’t favorable and missing their shot to become plants. But sometimes that hormone runs out, like when a tomato sits around on the counter for too long. Sometimes the hormone can be tricked into thinking conditions are right, especially if the environment is warm and moist. This can happen on ears of corn that experience a lot of rainfall and collect water inside their husks, and on fruit that doesn’t get used right away during hot and humid weather.

It may look creepy, but it doesn’t really affect the quality of the fruit. Unless you’re looking to sell it commercially, it’s more of a cool phenomenon than a problem. You can remove the sprouted seeds and eat around them, or turn the situation into a learning opportunity and plant the new sprouts. They likely won’t grow into an exact copy of their parent, but they will produce some kind of plant of the same species that makes fruit.

Source: gardeningknowhow.com

GROWING LETTUCE

While lettuce is a common garden vegetable, it comes in many color variations and leaf shapes. It is a cool-season crop that can be seeded/transplanted from mid-March to mid-May depending on where you are located in Missouri. Between 60 to 65 degrees is the ideal growing temperature. Warmer temperatures can lead to bolting (flowering) and bitterness.

Some fun varieties to try come in shades of red, green, and spotted lettuces, or a combination of blends. They come as leaf or head lettuce. Some varieties can be harvested young for baby leaves. Older standby varieties to try include Bibb, Black-seeded Simpson, Oakleaf, Salad Bowl, Bronze Beauty, Buttercrunch, Deer Tongue, Prizehead, Parris Island, Red Sails, or Ruby Red.

Some unique varieties to try include Lollo Rossa, Cimarron, Flashy Butter Gem, Lunix Lettuce, May Queen, Little Gem or Strawberry Cabbage Lettuce.

Lettuce is a shallow rooted crop that does well in containers. I have grown different types of lettuce in containers over the years. I like that I can pull them in the shade on warm days in the spring. By pulling the containers into a shady location, I can extend the life of the lettuce into mid-June, before I have to pull it out and replace it with a warm-season vegetable or flower.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 10: Horticulture Town Hall Meeting: 12 pm. Taught by state and regional specialists. A great opportunity to ask your gardening questions and learn from others. Register at https://ipm.missouri.edu/TownHalls/

Late May-June: Master Pollinator Steward hybrid course: For more information contact schutterj@missouri.edu or call the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866. Registration will open in April.

August 24-November 9: Master Gardener hybrid course: For more information contact schutterj@missouri.edu or call the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866. Registration will open in July.

Check out the MU IPM You tube channel for educational videos on timely gardening topics, and answers to some of your questions. https://www.youtube.com/user/MUIPM/videos
MARCH GARDENING TIPS

Ornamentals
- Trees, shrubs and perennials may be planted as soon as they become available at local nurseries.
- To control iris borer, clean up and destroy the old foliage before new growth begins.
- Fertilize bulbs with a "bulb booster" formulation broadcast over the planting beds. Hose off any granules that stick to the foliage.
- Dormant mail order plants should be unwrapped immediately. Keep the roots from drying out, store in a cool spot, and plant as soon as conditions allow.
- Loosen winter mulches from perennials cautiously. Recover plants if frost returns. Clean up beds by removing weeds and dead foliage.
- Heavy pruning of trees should be complete before growth occurs. Trees should not be pruned while new leaves are growing.
- Seeds of hardy annuals such as larkspur, bachelor's buttons, Shirley and California poppies should be direct sown in the garden now.
- Summer and fall blooming perennials should be divided in spring.
- Ornamental grasses should be cut to the ground as new growth begins.
- Spring bedding plants, such as pansies and toadflax (Linaria sp.), may be planted outdoors now.
- Apply a balanced fertilizer such as 6-12-12 to perennial beds when new growth appears.
- Apply sulfur to the soil around acid-loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons, hollies and dogwoods. Use a granular formulation at the rate of ½ pound per 100 square feet.
- Gradually start to pull back mulch from rose bushes.

Lawns
- Mow lawns low to remove old growth before new growth begins.
- Apply broadleaf herbicides for control of cool-season perennial and annual weeds. Do not apply to areas that will be seeded soon.
- Apply controls for wild garlic. It will take several years of annual applications for complete control.
- Thin spots and bare patches in the lawn can be overseeded now.

Vegetables
- Root crops such as horseradish, parsnips, Jerusalem artichokes, or carrots still in the ground from last year should be harvested before new growth appears.
- Cultivate weeds and remove old, dead stalks from the asparagus bed before new spears emerge.
- Fertilize the garden as the soil is being prepared for planting. Unless directed otherwise by a soil test, 1 to 2 pounds of 12-12-12 or an equivalent fertilizer per 100 square feet is usually sufficient.
- Delay planting if the garden soil is too wet. If a ball of soil crumbles easily after being squeezed together in your hand, it is dry enough to be safely worked.
- Asparagus and rhubarb roots should be planted as soon as the ground can be worked.
- Plant peas, lettuce, radishes, kohlrabi, mustard greens, collards, turnips, Irish potatoes, spinach and onions (seeds and sets) outdoors. Plant beets, carrots, parsley and parsnip seeds outdoors.
- Set out broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, Chinese cabbage and cauliflower transplants into the garden.
- Start seeds of tomatoes, peppers and eggplants indoors.

Fruits
- Gradually remove mulch from strawberries as the weather begins to warm.
- Continue pruning apple trees. Burn or destroy all prunings to minimize insect or disease occurrence.
- Continue pruning grapes. Bleeding causes no injury to the vines. Tie vines to the trellis before the buds swell to prevent bud injury and crop loss.
- Cleft and splice grafting can be done now. This must be completed before rootstocks break dormancy.
- Aphids begin to hatch on fruit trees as the buds begin to open.
- Apply dormant oil sprays now. Choose a dry day when freezing temperatures are not expected.
- Spray peach trees with a fungicide for the control of peach leaf curl disease. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- Mulch all bramble fruits for weed control.

Miscellaneous
- Set up nesting boxes for bluebirds.
- Watch for the harbinger of spring (Erigenia bulbosa) blooming in rich wooded areas.
- Spicebush is blooming in moist woodlands.
- Raise purple martin houses this week. Purple martins return to the St. Louis area.
- The white flowers of serviceberry (Amelanchier sp.) and wild plum (Prunus americana) are showy in wood-ed areas.
- Watch for the fuzzy blooms of the pussy willow (Salix sp.).

- Missouri Botanical Garden -