Fertilizing Spring-flowering Bulbs

The best time to fertilize spring-flowering bulbs is when foliage emerges in the spring rather than at flowering. Traditionally, gardeners have applied fertilizer during bloom or a bit after, but because bulb roots start to die at flowering, fertilizer applied at bloom is wasted. Roots are active when the foliage first pokes through the ground. Nutrients applied then help the plant produce flowers the following year. If bulbs have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium in the soil. It is best to use a soil test to be certain. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 lbs. per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 lbs. per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Turf fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 can be used, but cut the rate by a third. Remember to leave the foliage until it dies naturally. The energy in the foliage is transferred to the bulb as the foliage dies and will help bloom next year. (Ward Upham)

Flowers for Valentine’s Day

Have you ever wondered how exactly it is that there are plenty of flowers for everyone on Valentine’s Day? I mean, it’s not like there are cut-flower growers (producing hundreds of different types of flowers) in every city and town. How is it that you get a fresh bouquet of roses or tulips (in the off season) by just popping into your local floral shop or grocery store?

It’s a huge international effort, that’s how. Many of the out-of-season and exotic cut-flowers sold in the U.S. are grown in Columbia,
Ecuador, the Netherlands, Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Thailand. Other leaders in worldwide cut-flower exports include Israel and Italy. These producers have highly sophisticated, automated greenhouse systems and teams of people to manage everything from pest control to plant selection and harvest. It’s fascinatin. Growing plants is certainly an art and a science.

Growing the plants/flowers can be pretty complicated, but selling the flowers can be mind-boggling. After the flowers are packed and prepared for shipping (held in water, cool, almost freezing temperature in the trucks), they are delivered to a “market”. This is not just any market; this is the equivalent to the New York Stock Exchange for flowers, an auction house located in the Netherlands (the largest distributor of cut flowers in the world). In this huge auction house [Aalsmeer Auction in Holland is the 4th largest building in the world at 10.6 million square feet (243 acres)], the racks of flowers (20 million are sold daily) are paraded very quickly in front of buyers while detailed data and pictures of the freshly harvested product are flashed on screens above. Buyers are seated in theater seating (with tables for their laptops so it’s also a bit like a college classroom except that you can have food delivered to you like at a ball game) and bid quickly (less than 60 seconds) in order to get the best price for their customers. The price starts high, but if they wait too long, they might not be able to get the flowers their customers need.

As soon as the flowers are run through the auction room, they are transferred to a shipping area to be delivered across the world. In fact, Aalsmeer Auction is located adjacent to a major airport so that flowers can go directly to their final destinations. Once flowers are in the air, if they are coming to your town they will probably be delivered to a broker in Chicago or Miami who then sells them to wholesalers who break up the racks and prepare smaller lots to send to your local florist. All of this happens within 2-6 days of being plucked from a plant (most often 48 hours).

While most plants get delivered to your kitchen countertop this way, there are certainly domestic cut-flower growers who provide an equally good product and require less shipping. California, Florida, Hawaii and Colorado have the largest cut-flower production areas in the U.S. You’ll also find local folks who grow a small number of delicate or regional specialty cut-flowers. To find one near you, use the search tool at the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers website (www.ascfg.org). The Great Plains has its own special offerings for floral designs and you may just find a prairie plant flower or seed head in your next bouquet.

So, to answer the original question: How can there be enough flowers for everyone on Valentine’s Day? Just remember, while it may be winter here, it is summer south of the equator. Seasonality can disrupt some international crops, but it usually only affects price, not supply, as growers simply increase production somewhere else in the world. In fact, the increase in production around Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day is generally only about 15%. So this year as you’re admiring the beautiful flowers from your sweetie, take a minute to think about the long (but quick) journey they took to be in your hands. And keep an eye out for local flowers, too. (Cheryl Boyer)
The following suggestions are for cool-season grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue. Zoysiagrass, bermudagrass, and buffalograss are warm-season grasses and require a different maintenance regime. A warm-season grass calendar will be covered in a later newsletter.

March
Spot treat broadleaf weeds if necessary. Treat on a day that is 50 degrees or warmer. Rain or irrigation within 24 hours of application will reduce effectiveness.

April
Apply crabgrass preventer when redbud trees are in full bloom, usually in April. The preventer needs to be watered in before it will start to work. Remember that a good, thick lawn is the best weed prevention and may be all that is needed.

May
Fertilize with a slow-release fertilizer if you water your lawn or if you receive enough rainfall that your turf normally doesn’t go drought-dormant during the summer. If there are broadleaf weeds, spot treat with a spray or use a fertilizer that includes a weed killer. Rain or irrigation within 24 hours of application will reduce effectiveness of the weed killer, but the fertilizer needs to be watered in. If you are using a product that has both fertilizer and weed killer, wait 24 hours after application before watering in.

June through Mid-July
Apply second round of crabgrass preventer by June 15 – unless you have used Dimension (dithiopyr) or Barricade (prodiamine) for the April application. These two products normally provide season-long control with a single application. Remember to water it in. If grubs have been a problem in the past, apply a product containing imidacloprid during the first half of July. This works to prevent grub damage. It must be watered in before it becomes active.

Late-July through August
If you see grub damage, apply a grub killer that contains Dylox. Imidacloprid is effective against young grubs and may not be effective on late instar grubs. The grub killer containing Dylox must be watered in within 24 hours or effectiveness drops.

September
Fertilize around Labor Day. This is the most important fertilization of the year. Water in fertilizer.
November
Fertilize. This fertilizer is taken up by the roots but is not used until the following spring. Water in fertilizer. Spray for broadleaf weeds even if they are small. Broadleaf weeds are much easier to control in the fall than in the spring. Spray on a day that is at least 50 degrees. Rain or irrigate within 24 hours reduces effectiveness. Use label rates for all products! (Ward Upham)

MISCELLANEOUS

Soil Testing

Most gardeners think that soil tests are done only to find out what nutrients are deficient. However, it is just as important to know if you have adequate levels of nutrients so you don't add unneeded fertilizer. The most basic soil test checks pH and the levels of phosphorus and potassium. Most of the lawn and garden soil tests that come out of our soil-testing lab show more than adequate levels of both phosphorus and potassium. If those nutrients are not needed, applying them is a waste of money and can be a source of pollution. In extreme cases, excess phosphorus can interfere with the uptake of micronutrients. So, if you haven't taken a soil test in several years, take one this spring.

Begin by taking a representative sample from a number of locations in the garden or lawn that goes from the surface to 6 to 8 inches deep. Mix the samples together in a clean container and select about 1 cup of soil. Take the soil to your local K-State Research and Extension office to have tests done at the K-State soil-testing laboratory for a small charge. A soil test determines fertility problems, not other conditions that may exist such as poor drainage, poor soil structure, soil borne diseases or insects, chemical contaminants or damage, or shade with root competition from other plants. All of these conditions may reduce plant performance but cannot be evaluated by a soil test. (Ward Upham)

Butterfly Gardening

Butterfly gardening is becoming more popular with Kansans. Providing for the basic needs of butterflies, such as food, shelter and liquids, will encourage butterflies to visit this summer. There are a number of plants that attract butterflies. However, different species of butterflies prefer different plants. Using a variety of plant material that vary in blooming times of day and year helps attract a diverse group of visitors. Plant groups of the same plant together; a single plant is difficult for a butterfly to detect. If trying to attract a certain
species of butterfly, learn which plant(s) that butterfly prefers, and then emphasize that plant in your planting. Annuals that attract butterflies include ageratum, cosmos, French marigold, petunia, verbena and zinnia.

Perennials and shrubs can be split into those that bloom early, mid-season and late. Good choices for those that bloom early are allium, chives, forget-me-not and lilac. Bee balm, butterfly bush, black-eyed Susan, buttonbush, butterfly weed, daisy, daylily, gaillardia, lavender, lily, mint, phlox, privet, sunflower and veronica are fitting picks for mid-season bloom. Late bloomers include aster, glossy abelia and sedum. There are other things you can do to encourage butterflies. Butterflies are cold-blooded and like open areas where they can sun themselves on cool days and shade to cool off when the sun is too intense.

Butterflies also need water. A simple way to make a butterfly pool is to take a bucket, fill it with gravel, and bury it to the rim. Now add water, sugar water or sweet drinks so that the butterflies can land on the gravel but still reach the liquid.

Our Johnson County Master Gardeners have put together a site on butterfly gardening that gives more detailed information at http://www.johnson.ksu.edu/p.aspx?tabid=117. Don’t overlook the left-hand column that gives the major divisions of information. (Ward Upham)

**Call for Local Sources of Vegetable Seed**

If your business sells K-State recommended vegetable seed, let us know and we will make a list that our subscribers can link to. We need the following information:

- Name of Business:
- Business Address:
- Phone Number:
- E-mail (if applicable):
- Web site (if applicable):
- Will you ship or in-store sales only:
- Prepackaged seed only or will you custom-package:
- Do you also sell transplants of K-State recommended vegetable varieties:

Send the info to: wupham@ksu.edu

Also, we have updated our mail-order listing of tomato seed suppliers with the addition of Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds and Pinetree Seeds. You can find the listing at http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc3643.ashx (Ward Upham)

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To view Upcoming Events: http://tinyurl.com/fswqe

The web version includes color images that illustrate subjects discussed. To subscribe to this newsletter electronically, send an e-mail message to cdipman@ksu.edu or wupham@ksu.edu listing your e-mail address in the message.

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