Horticulture Newsletter

April 14, 2026

Kansas State University
Horticulture and Natural Resources

Video of the Week:

Perennial plants grow for many years, and over time they can spread and outgrow their space. Now is a good time of year to divide perennial plants, digging them up, separating them into smaller clumps, and replanting them in the landscape. This week's video highlights how to divide perennial plants, including step by step instructions for reestablishing divided perennials: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/dividing-perennial-flowers

Garden Calendar:

- Prune fruit trees if pruning is not already completed
- Remove mulch from strawberry plants
- Continue planting cool season vegetables
- Cut back last year's dead growth from perennials
- Remove thick winter mulch from perennial garden plants
- Sharpen mower blades
- Remove winter dust from leaves of houseplants by gently rinsing with room temperature water

Vegetables:

Tips For Transplanting Plants Outside Into The Garden:

Follow these steps to increase success transplanting plants into the garden:

Select Good Transplants: Select plants that have a dense root system, with many white, fibrous roots. Look for plants with dark green leaves that are free of leaf spots or scorch. Plants should be dense, and well branched, not tall and spindly. Select plants with minimal flowers, so after transplanting plants can prioritize root growth before fruit/seed production.

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Harden Off Transplants: When preparing to transplant young plants out into the garden, begin by hardening off plants in the two weeks leading up to transplanting. This includes decreasing the amount of water given and gradually increasing their exposure to the sun and wind. Helping plants gradually acclimate to outdoor growing conditions will toughen plants and increase transplanting success. For more guidance on hardening off transplants, refer to the article on page 2 of the March 31st Hort Newsletter.

Water Plants Well: Before planting, water all potted plants thoroughly. After planting, the potting soil around the rootball will dry out more quickly than the surrounding garden soil. Thoroughly wetting the rootball beforehand is critical to ensure plants are well hydrated at planting time.

Layout Planting Locations: When it is time for transplanting to occur, mark out the area, designating the planting rows and optimum spacing between plants. Use a hoe or shovel to mark the ground, or place potted plants in their approximate planting location and adjust spacing as needed. It may also be helpful to stop and create a planting map or plant markers to be able to identify different varieties later.

Dig The Hole: When preparing the planting hole, dig a hole that is approximately the same depth as the pot, but at least twice as wide as the width of the pot. Most transplants should be planted at the same depth or only slightly deeper than they are currently growing in the container. Incorporate organic matter or necessary fertilizers into the soil before planting.

Evaluate Plant Roots: Gently remove plants from the pot by holding them by the rootball, rather than the stem. If minimal roots are visible, try not to disturb the roots when planting. Ideally, many roots will be visible, especially near the bottom of the pot. In this case, gently tease apart circling roots and lay them out horizontally in the planting hole. With plants growing in peat pots or other biodegradable pots, it will still be best to remove the pots, or at the very least remove the bottom portion of the pot when planting.

Backfill, Water And Fertilize: Cover the rootball in the planting hole with soil and gently tamp down the soil. Firming soil around the stem will help to provide support for the plant. Water gently, but thoroughly to provide significant moisture in the garden soil. A starter fertilizer can be used at planting.

Monitor Transplants: Monitor the transplants frequently the first few days after planting. New transplants will likely need watered daily to help with establishment. Keep a close eye on temperatures and wind conditions, and provide additional protection as needed.

Fruit:

Recommended Fruit Varieties For Kansas:

When planning to add fruit trees and other fruit crops to your garden, it is important to be deliberate and choose cultivars that will be well adapted to the local growing conditions. Often the grocery store varieties of apples or grapes are not the varieties that will grow best in Kansas. Save both time and labor by selecting well adapted cultivars that are disease resistant and tolerant of temperature extremes.

To find a list of fruit cultivar recommendations that are well adapted to Kansas, visit the Small- and Tree-Fruit Cultivars publication: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/small-and-tree-fruit-cultivars_MF1028.pdf

Be aware that some types of fruit require two or more varieties planted nearby for cross pollination and fruit set to occur. This type of fruit is known as self-sterile. Apple, sweet cherry, pear, plum, elderberry and blueberry require or benefit from multiple varieties planted in the same area in order to produce consistent fruit.

Visit our Planning Your Fruit Garden publication for more suggestions on how to maximize your fruit production: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/planning-your-fruit-garden_MF352

Fruit Tree Sprays and Rain:

A spreader-sticker is a product used at the time of spraying to improve the distribution and retention of fungicides and insecticides on fruit and leaves. Many gardeners may not be familiar with these products, but they can help our fungicides and insecticides work better.

Spreader-stickers should be used with fruit tree sprays as it allows the spray product to coat the tree's leaves and fruit more thoroughly and to resist being washed off during rain events. However, even with a spreader-sticker, rain can reduce the length of time sprays are effective:

- Gentle rains that total less than one inch of rainfall will not significantly affect spray residues in most cases.
- As a general rule, one to two inches of rain will reduce pesticide residue by half. In this case, reduce the number of days until the next application by half.
- If trees receive more than two inches of rain, spray residue from the last application will be mostly removed. Re-spray as soon as possible.

These recommendations apply for a soft, gentle rain. If trees receive a hard, driving rain, cut the rates in half.

When purchasing a spreader-sticker, keep in mind that big box stores rarely carry these products, but garden centers, nurseries, or well-stocked hardware stores often do.

Flowers:

Fragrant Spring Flowering Shrubs For Kansas:

Spring brings many things to the Kansas landscape, including flushes of new, green growth and a wide variety of colorful flowers. What is often overlooked in landscape designs, however, is the smell of spring. Many shrubs that are well adapted to Kansas can have beautiful flowers that are also highly fragrant, even from yards away.

Spring's beautiful flowers should not just be seen, they should be smelled. Here are ten fragrant spring flowering shrubs that can delight the senses in your landscape:

1. Common Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*): a traditional, multi-stemmed shrub reaching 12-16 feet tall and 8-12 feet wide. Cone shaped flowers commonly bloom in lavender, purple, pink, or white and are very fragrant.
2. Dwarf Korean Lilacs (*Syringa meyeri* or *Syringa pubescens* subsp. *patula*): a smaller lilac native to Asia, reaching between 4-8 feet tall, and 6-10 feet wide. Cone shaped flower clusters are slightly smaller than traditional lilac, and bloom in a violet-purple color. Common cultivars include 'Miss Kim' and 'Palibin', some cultivars may rebloom.
3. Mock Orange (*Philadelphus* spp.): medium to large shrub with white spring flowers with a fragrance that is often compared to the scent of orange blossoms. Grows with minimal care in full sun to part shade.
4. Koreanspice Viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*): A medium size shrub, reaching 4-6 feet tall and wide. In spring reddish-pink buds open to a round cluster of white flowers with a clove-like fragrance. Many cultivars are available.
5. Burkwood Viburnum (*Viburnum x burkwoodii*): a densely branched, multi-stemmed shrub growing 8-10 feet tall and 5-7 feet wide. Very good heat and cold tolerance, with clusters of white spring flowers.
6. Judd Viburnum (*Viburnum x juddii*): a rounded shrub, reaching 6-8 feet tall and 6-10 feet wide. Pink buds open to round clusters of sweetly fragrant, white flowers that can be over 2.5-3.5 inches wide.
7. Fragrant Snowball Viburnum (*Viburnum* × *carlcephalum*): an open, multi-stemmed shrub growing 6-10 feet tall and wide. Fragrant white flowers bloom in dense, rounded clusters 3-5 inches in diameter, resembling a snowball. This species blooms later than most viburnums.
8. Magnolia (*Magnolia* spp.): there are many types of Magnolia that grow well in Kansas, varying in size from medium shrub to small trees. Most have large showy flowers that are also fragrant.
9. Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*): A shrub native to moist, low-lying areas of central and eastern United States. Both flowers and leaves are fragrant. In spring, clusters of yellow-green flowers bloom along the branches before leaves emerge.
10. Dwarf Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenia*): short, low growing deciduous shrub that colonizes by suckers, usually 2-3 feet tall and wide. Plants produce bottlebrush like spikes of white flowers. Grows best in part shade with medium moisture.

Flowering shrubs from top to bottom: Lilac, Korean Spice Viburnum, Sweetbay Magnolia

Visit our Deciduous Shrubs for Kansas publication for more shrub recommendations: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/deciduous-shrubs-for-kansas_MF3116

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Turf:

Watering Your Lawn In Spring:

When watering your lawn in the spring, focus on encouraging deep root growth and building drought tolerance. Springtime temperatures are cooler and evaporation rates are low, so turfgrass requires much less frequent irrigation now than in summer months. One deep watering per week is likely sufficient for most Kansas lawns in spring. Do not overwater. Overwatering will weaken turfgrass root systems, decrease summer drought tolerance, and favor weeds and diseases.

Water based on plant needs, rather than a fixed calendar. Apply water only when the lawn shows signs of stress, such as a dull bluish-green color or footprints that remain visible after walking across the grass.

When water is needed, irrigate slowly and deeply so moisture reaches 6 to 8 inches down into the soil, then allow the lawn to dry before watering again. This "soak and wait" approach promotes deeper roots and improves drought resistance. Prioritize watering in the morning hours when temperatures are cooler and low wind speeds reduce water loss.

Visit the Watering Your Lawn publication for more information on best watering techniques: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/watering-your-lawn_MF2059

Trees & Shrubs:

Cedar Apple Rust Galls Are Releasing Spores:

May flowers are not the only thing that April showers usher in across Kansas, Cedar Apple Rust also comes into "full bloom" after spring rains take place. These orange, jelly-like masses are easily visible on junipers, like the eastern red cedar, when periods of wet spring weather occur.

Cedar Apple Rust is one of three common rust pathogens in Kansas (along with Cedar Quince Rust and Cedar Hawthorn Rust). All three rusts are fungal diseases that spend the winter months as dormant galls on juniper trees. When wet weather arrives in spring, the orange, jelly-like masses emerge from the galls and release fungal spores to infect their summer host plants, including apples, crabapples, hawthorns, Callery pears, and quince plants. Once spores are released, they blow in the wind and land on the wet leaves of these host plants. As they infect their summer host plant, leaf spots begin to form on plant leaves within 1-3 weeks. These fungal leaf spots slowly expand across the leaf surface until they begin to produce their own fungal spores beginning around mid-summer (July). When summer rains occur, these spores are blown back to the junipers where new galls form for winter and repeat the process over again.

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While the orange masses of these galls are dramatic this time of year, they have minimal impact on junipers. These rusts can be a serious problem on their summer hosts, however, causing leaf spots, premature leaf drop, and reduced yields on fruit trees. The severity of these symptoms will vary from year to year and will be most intense during springs with abundant wet weather. If summer host trees only receive small amounts of rust each year, the overall long-term health of the tree should not be significantly impacted.

Since junipers are so prevalent in Kansas and given that spores can travel over 2-3 miles to infect host plants, management options are limited. The first, and best option for rust management is to select trees that are resistant to rust. Many apple and flowering crabapple cultivars have rust-resistance, so be sure to select varieties with this trait.

For existing trees, maintain proper tree pruning to allow air movement through the canopy. This practice helps reduce leaf wetness that can promote rust diseases. Maintaining overall tree health through proper mulching, watering, and fertilization will also help prevent disease.

If existing trees have a history of severe rust infections, including significant defoliation, homeowners could consider applying preventative fungicide sprays on the apple hosts when spring leaves emerge and the orange galls are active. Look for products that contain active ingredients such as myclobutanil or propiconazole – read the label carefully to determine if products are approved for fruit tree use, or just on ornamental trees. For best control, start applications in early April, and repeat applications every 7-10 days through May, according to label instructions and while the orange galls are present in junipers.

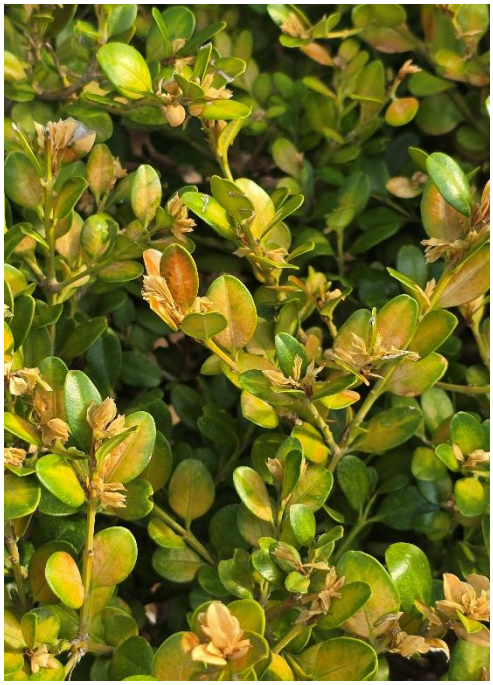
Visit our Cedar Apple Rust fact sheet for more information about this fungal disease and it's lifecycle: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Cedar%20Apple%20and%20Related%20Rusts.pdf

Winter Injury To Kansas Boxwoods:

Many boxwoods (*Buxus sempervirens*) across Kansas are showing browning, discoloration, or branch dieback this spring, instead of their usual dark green, glossy foliage. This is likely a result of winter injury. While winter injury can happen every year, certain weather conditions can make damage worse in some years more than others.

Winter temperatures can cause injury on boxwoods in several ways, including extreme cold temperatures during winter months, sharp drops in temperatures during the fall as plants harden off, or intense cold snaps in the spring as plants exit dormancy. Extreme colds in January 2026 and cold snaps in March 2026 both contributed to winter injury this year.

Other environmental factors, such as drought, planting location, exposure to drying winds and salt injury from winter ice melts can also compound the damage caused by temperatures. Desiccating winter winds can cause significant injury, as boxwoods and other evergreens constantly lose water from their foliage during the winter months. On windy days, the rate of water lost from the leaves can be higher than the roots are able to supply to the plant, especially when soils are dry or the ground is frozen.



In many evergreens, leaves or needles may scorch and turn brown, either at the ends of the needles or with the entire needle turning brown. For boxwoods, winter in jury can occur in more varied ways. Often the outside edges of the leaf may turn brown, or the entire leaf may be affected. This is most common on the upper or outer leaves and stems. Severe damage may kill twigs, branches or even entire plants.

While it may be tempting to address the browning and winter injury on boxwoods now, the best course of action is to wait and see how the plant responds in time. The best time to assess the extent of the damage and the potential for recovery is mid-May. By this time, new growth should have developed, and it will be clear how much new growth will occur. Wait until this time to do heavy pruning and prune back to new growth. It is natural for many boxwood varieties to have leaves that bronzed or turn colors in the winter months. Waiting until mid-May to prune allows for temporary discoloration to fade before pruning.

When evaluating the damage of winter injury, look for life in the plant tissues of stems and branches. Lightly scratch the bark along small branches with your fingernail to determine if branches are healthy, even if leaves are discolored. If the plant tissue directly underneath the bark is green, the branch is alive. Wait for the plant to re-leaf out before pruning. You can also check for potential recovery by pulling off a few buds. If they are brown or dry inside, new buds will have to develop for new growth to occur, and this will take additional time, occurring as late as early June.

Once winter injury has occurred to boxwoods, there is very little that can be done. The best course of action is to work to avoid any further stress on the plant. This includes providing supplemental water, especially during dry periods and drought conditions that many are experiencing now. Wet the soil 6-12 inches deep with each watering to encourage deep root growth. A single spring fertilizer application as new growth begins can also aid in recovery, however, do not overfertilize, as this may further weaken the plant.

Additional steps can be taken throughout the year to limit winter injury to boxwoods:

- Avoid pruning boxwoods in the late summer and fall months. Late season pruning does not allow time for pruning cuts to heal before winter and often encourages the plant to push a flush of new growth late in the year. Both scenarios increase the likelihood of winter injury.
- Monitor soil moisture throughout the winter months. Periods of winter drought often go unnoticed,

and supplemental waterings can be easy to overlook when irrigation systems are turned off. Sunshine and winter winds are constantly pulling moisture from plant leaves, even in the winter months. Maintaining adequate soil moisture is critical to prevent damage. Apply mulch 2-4 inches deep around plants to help conserve soil moisture.

- Avoid applying fertilizer in fall and late season months. New growth encouraged by fertilization will be more likely to suffer winter injury. If fertilization is necessary, fertilize in early spring as growth begins.
- When planting new boxwoods, prioritize spring plantings over fall planting times. Plants installed in late fall will have minimal time to establish new roots into the surrounding soil before the onset of winter. This increases the likelihood of winter injury due to drought stress and winter wind desiccation.

Visit our winter damage fact sheet for more information on how winter injury may impact trees and shrubs: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Trees%20-%20Winter%20Damage.pdf

Miscellaneous:

Avoid Working In Wet Soils:

When garden soils are wet, it is important to avoid digging, tilling, or heavy traffic in order to reduce compaction and preserve soil health. A healthy plant requires healthy soil to grow, and unfortunately a few minutes of working in too wet of soils can create structural issues in the soil that may take years to correct.

Healthy soils are made up of mineral particles (sand, silt, and clay) and organic matter, as well as pore spaces between these materials that hold air and water. Soil organisms (including fungi, bacteria, and invertebrates) play an important role in binding soil particles and organic matter into clusters, or soil aggregates. These aggregates create larger sized pore spaces and greater interconnectivity of pores, allowing roots to more easily grow through.

The greatest danger of working in wet soil is damaging these soil aggregates. Water weakens the bonds holding together soil aggregates, allowing aggregates to be more easily damaged by digging or tilling when soils are wet. It is essential to maintain structure and the formation of aggregates by avoiding disturbing wet soils.

Another, more common danger of working in wet soil is creating soil compaction. Soil compaction is the compression of soil particles, reducing pore space in the soil. Compacted soils reduce plant growth, reduce root depth, restrict water and air movement in the soil, result in nutrient stresses, and cause slow seedling emergence. In wet soils, compaction can be caused by foot traffic, lawn mowers and other equipment, digging, or tilling. In dry soils, friction between soil particles resists compaction, however, in moist soils, water acts as a lubricant between particles, allowing soils to compact more easily.

If the soil is damp or wet, it is best to wait for drier conditions before digging, tilling, or working soils. Steps can be taken to relieve compaction and rebuild soil structure, but they often take considerable time to accomplish. Preventing soil compaction is far more effective than attempting to correct it after it occurs.

To evaluate whether your garden soil is dry enough to work, dig up a small amount of soil with a trowel and squeeze it in your hand. If the soil breaks apart easily and crumbles through your fingers, it is ready for planting. If instead the soil instead forms a wet, muddy ball, allow the soil to dry for a few more days before repeating this test.

Soils that are too wet to work, till, or plant in will form a wet, muddy ball after a handful of soil is squeezed in the hand.

Soils that are dry enough to work, till, or plant in will soil breaks apart easily and crumbles through your fingers after a handful of soil is squeezed in the hand.

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