



Horticulture Newsletter

April 21, 2026

KANSAS STATE
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Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



Few Kansas gardeners have perfect garden soil on their property. Many Kansans deal with heavy clay soils to grow in. While creating raised beds might be one option to better growing conditions, incorporating organic matter into your existing soil can be another option for improving garden soils. [This week's video highlights how to improve garden soils](#), including what sources of organic matter to consider: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/improving-soil-for-gardens>

Announcements:

Kansas Forest Service's 2026 Callery Pear Buyback Program:

A little over one week remains to register to receive your free tree with the Kansas Forest Service's 2026 Callery Pear Buyback Program. This event is intended to raise awareness about the spread of Callery Pear trees in Kansas, and to encourage landowners to help limit that spread, by removing a Callery Pear tree from their property and receiving a free tree as a replacement. Tree pickup locations will be in Wichita (May 12), Ellsworth (May 13), and Manhattan (May 14). This offer is open to all Kansas residents, and proof of Callery pear tree removal must be provided. Participants must pre-register by April 30, 2026 to participate. To learn more about this event and eligibility requirements, and to sign up to participate, [visit the Kansas Forest Service's website: https://www.kansasforests.org/events/calendars_and_articles/callerypearbuyback2026.html](https://www.kansasforests.org/events/calendars_and_articles/callerypearbuyback2026.html)

CALLERY PEAR BUYBACK PROGRAM

*Help reduce the spread of the invasive ornamental pear trees!
Remove a callery pear tree from your property & receive a free
native tree suited to your local community to replace it!*

**TUES
MAY 12**

**Wichita, KS
3:00 PM - 6:00 PM**

**WED
MAY 13**

**Ellsworth, KS
3:00 PM - 6:00 PM**

**THURS
MAY 14**

**Manhattan, KS
3:00 PM - 6:00 PM**

Visit [kansasforests.org](https://www.kansasforests.org) for additional information on program requirements and sign-ups.



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Department of Horticulture
and Natural Resources

2021 Throckmorton Plant Science Center
1712 Claflin, Manhattan, KS 66506
HortSupport@ksu.edu (785)-532-6173 www.hnr.k-state.edu

Garden Calendar:

- Thin radishes, beets and carrots as needed
- Turn the compost pile after a long winter rest
- Prune rose bushes
- Do not water lawns unless extremely dry – frequent early season irrigation sets turf up for higher water use in the summer months
- Remove seed heads from spring bulbs
- Apply a 2-4 inch mulch layer around plants
- Do not move houseplants or tropicals outside until night temperatures remain over 60 degrees

Vegetables:

Harvesting Rhubarb & Managing Flower Stalks:

Rhubarb, like asparagus, is a perennial vegetable that can be harvested for many seasons once established. Rhubarb is harvested for the leaf stalk, which is also called a petiole. Begin harvesting stems as soon as they are large enough to use, usually a half inch or larger in diameter and 10 plus inches in length. Harvest leaf stalks gradually, never removing more than two-thirds of the fully developed stalks at one time. Harvest can continue for up to 7 to 8 weeks, as long as the leaf stalks remain large and thick. Stop harvesting by late May to early June and allow the plant to produce summer growth for continued production the following season.



Remember the large leaves of the Rhubarb plant are poisonous. Leaves should be trimmed from the petiole and discarded.

Some years rhubarb will produce large, hollow-stemmed seed stalks that arise from the center of the plant. Seed stalks should be broken off or cut out as they appear so that energy will go into plant vigor rather than seed production. Seed stalks appear over a several week period, so be vigilant in removing them. In some cases, seed stalks may indicate an established plant is crowded and may need to be divided. Newer varieties of rhubarb may have less of a tendency to produce seed stalks than the older varieties.

Fruit:

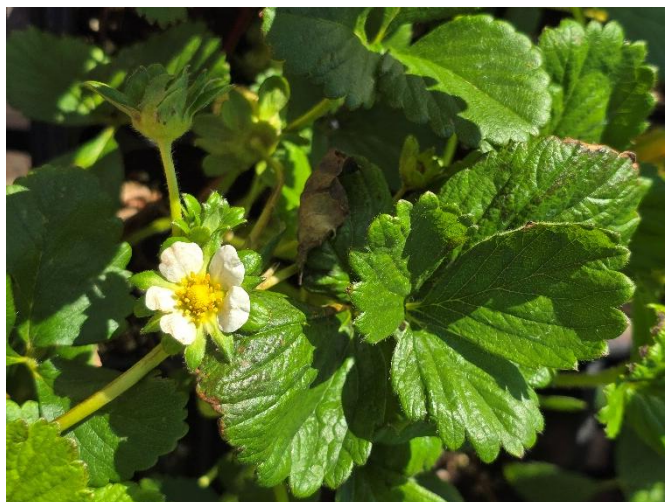
Fertilizing Strawberries and Brambles:

Most garden soils in Kansas have adequate levels of phosphorous and potassium, especially if the area has been fertilized in the past. However, it is recommended that a soil test be done every 3 years to be sure the nutrient needs of your fruit planting are being met. If a soil test recommends phosphorus and potassium, use a 10-10-10 fertilizer or 12-12-12 instead of what we recommend below but triple the rate. For example, instead of ½ cup per 10 feet of row, use 1.5 cups per 10 feet of row.

Strawberries (June-Bearing): June-bearing strawberries are not fertilized in early spring as this can make the berries soft and more prone to rot. Fall fertilization is preferred, as this will help develop more fruit buds for harvest the following year. Fertilize at renovation and again in early to late-August. In most cases, strawberries need primarily nitrogen, so the recommendations are for a high nitrogen fertilizer such as a 27-3-3, 29-5-4, 30-3-3 or something similar. Though recommended for lawns, these fertilizers will also work well for strawberries as long as they do not contain weed killers or crabgrass preventers. Apply ½ cup for every 10 feet of row. [Visit the Strawberries publication](#) for more information on renovating and fertilizing strawberry beds:

<http://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/mf598.pdf>

Strawberries (Everbearing or Day-Neutral): Fertilize in the spring as growth starts and again in early August. Use the rates recommended for June-bearing strawberries. Everbearing (day-neutral) strawberries are not renovated.



Blackberries and Raspberries (Brambles): In most cases, brambles need primarily nitrogen, so unless a soil test directs otherwise, use a high nitrogen fertilizer with a nitrogen level between 25-30%, such as a 27-3-3, 29-5-4, 30-3-3 or something similar. Though recommended for lawns, these fertilizers will also work well as long as they do not contain weed killers or crabgrass preventers. Apply one-third cup for every 10 feet of row. Fertilize in spring as growth begins and again after harvest. Visit our [Raspberries and Blackberries publication](#) for more growing information: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/raspberries-and-blackberries_MF720

Flowers:

Winter Injury To Roses:

Many roses are showing signs of winter injury statewide this spring, with noticeable sections of dead branches visible in most rose bushes. While roses are sensitive to extreme cold temperatures during winter months (such as the below zero weather in late January 2026), more roses this spring have been damaged by the intense cold snaps in mid-March as new growth began.

With warm weather in February and March 2026, many rose bushes in Kansas began producing new growth earlier than normal. New growth in roses is very sensitive to cold temperatures. When new growth is exposed to frosts and freezes, dieback is likely to occur. Leaves wilt, turn brown, and can become either water soaked and mushy, or dry and crispy. Eventually leaves fall from the plant. Water can also freeze within the stems (also called canes) of the rose bush, causing stems to darken in color, often turning black. Several inches of branch dieback can occur. Injured canes can also develop a withered, wrinkled appearance. Inside the canes, the normal



creamy-white to light green center of the cane (called the pith), discolors and turns brown. Damaged canes and buds will become dry and brittle. In severe cases of winter injury, the entire plant may die, but for most roses, recovery is likely.

Rose bushes that have suffered winter injury will require pruning to remove damage. Delay pruning, however, until the danger of hard frosts and freezes has passed to avoid additional rounds of cold-related dieback. Allowing roses time to produce a second flush of new growth before pruning will also be beneficial. As new growth appears on the plant, the full extent of winter injury can be evaluated, and the location of pruning cuts more easily determined.



When pruning roses, it is critical to use sharp pruning shears such as hand pruners or loppers. Be sure tools are clean and disinfected. A pair of thick leather gloves will also be useful.

Begin pruning roses from the ends of the branches, and work down the cane until new growth or healthy buds are visible. The more severe the cold injury, the further down the cane it may be necessary to go to find new growth. Once new growth is located, cut canes $\frac{1}{4}$ inch above healthy growth, with a cut at a 45 degree angle. Whenever possible, prune back to new growth that naturally points outward, away from the center of the rose bush. This will help improve overall shape, and increase airflow through the plant, reducing disease.

Pruning is important for maintaining healthy plants. Avoid early spring pruning of roses to help minimize winter injury to roses. Early season pruning induces rapid cane growth that will be susceptible to spring freezes. For roses grown in Kansas, it is best to prune them after the threat of frost has passed and as new growth appears. For most of Kansas this will be early to mid-April.

Water roses deeply to reduce drought stress on the plant and aid in recovery. Boost rose growth with proper fertilization at planting and during the growing season. Fertilize established roses three times per year: before budbreak, during the first flowering, and after the summer flowers have faded (no later than mid-August).

Turf:

Seeding Cool-Season Lawns in the Spring:

Although many plants are beginning to actively grow, spring is not the ideal time to plant tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. For these cool season grasses, summer is the most stressful part of the year. Heat and drought limit tall fescue growth, which can kill poorly established grass. Weeds, such as crabgrass and foxtail, generally outcompete spring planted cool season grasses as well.

While September is the ideal time for planting cool season turfgrass, spring seeding of tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass can be accomplished if planted from mid-March to early April. Try to limit spring plantings of cool season turfgrass to filling in bare spots or overseeding thin areas. It will be best to save major cool season lawn renovations until September.



When filling in bare spots, plant grass seed at a rate of 6 to 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Use half this rate if overseeding thin areas of existing lawn. Ensure seeds have good soil contact by using a garden rake or a verticutter to loosen the soil surface at planting. Water well after planting and monitor soil moisture levels carefully so the top half inch to one inch of soil surface does not dry out during establishment. With careful site preparation and consistent follow-up maintenance, spring overseeding can be achieved.

Whenever possible, plant tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass from sod rather than seed this time of year. Sod contains an already actively growing root system that will speed up establishment, improving chances of survival in the heat and drought of summer.

Alternatively, consider switching from a cool season turfgrass to a warm season turfgrass species, such as Buffalograss, Zoysia, or Bermudagrass. These warm season turfgrasses generally provide greater heat and drought tolerance and are ideally planted in late spring to early summer (May to July).

Trees & Shrubs:

Time For Ash-Lilac Borer Control:

Ash-lilac borers are an insect pest you may have never seen, but whose damage is common on ash trees, lilac, and sometimes privet. Borer caterpillars develop beneath the bark of their host plants, where they feed and interrupt the flow of water and nutrients within the plant. Ash-lilac borers are most common on plants that are stressed, aging, or in decline.

In ash trees, borers cause damage as larvae tunnel under the bark of the trunk. As larvae mature, they develop ¼ inch round exit holes in the tree bark from which adults emerge. With repeated infestations, tree bark often falls from the tree, revealing tunneling damage.

In lilacs and privet, damage is most visible when entire canes or stems of the plant suddenly wilt. Upon closer inspection, lower portions of the canes will show swollen stems and separating bark. A fine sawdust-like excrement is often present around holes in the canes.



Ash-Lilac Borer adult moth.

Photo credit: Mark Dreiling, Bugwood.org

Ash-lilac borers overwinter as larvae in infested trees and shrubs. Moths generally begin to emerge in mid to late April. Emergence peaks in May, dwindles by mid to late June and ends by the first week of July. However, this varies by year.

As adult moths, ash-lilac borers resemble paper wasps in appearance and flight habits to deter predators. Adults have a black, slender body, with yellow bands around their abdomen. Larvae bore under the bark of Ash trees and inside lilac stems, and when full-grown reach one inch in length with a brown head and white body.

Now is the key time to inspect plants for ash-lilac borer activity and consider treatment options. Insecticide sprays can only prevent ash-lilac borer attack, they will not control borers already inside the plant. Timing of spray treatments can be determined through use of pheromone traps or when Vanhoutte spirea is in full to late bloom (occurring now). There is one generation per year.

It is important to note the ash-lilac borer is a different insect than emerald ash borer. The ash-lilac borers have been around for many years, while emerald ash borer was not confirmed in Kansas until 2012, and is only known to be present in 19 counties in northeast Kansas.

Visit our [Ash-Lilac Borer fact sheet](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Ash-lilac-Borer.pdf) for more information about this insect and it's control: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Ash-lilac-Borer.pdf>

Miscellaneous:

Lots Of Ladybugs Sightings In Kansas This Spring:

If you have spent much time outside in the landscape or garden this spring in south central Kansas or around the state, you have likely encountered a familiar beneficial insect in the garden, the ladybug. Ladybugs, also known as ladybird beetles or lady beetles, have been seen in large numbers in areas of the state this spring.

"The excessive number of ladybird beetles is not an uncommon phenomenon," says Professor and Extension Specialist in Horticultural Entomology, Dr. Raymond Cloyd. "Ladybird beetle populations are usually associated with weather conditions and abundance of prey (i.e. aphids)."

Populations of ladybugs and their prey are contingent on temperature, moisture, and plant availability. Mild winters and warm spring temperatures result in populations of ladybugs emerging early in the year and building up in numbers.

Both ladybug larva and adults are fierce predators, with adults consuming up to 5,000 aphids during their lifespan. Consequently, ladybug populations rely on available prey in an area. While aphids are their

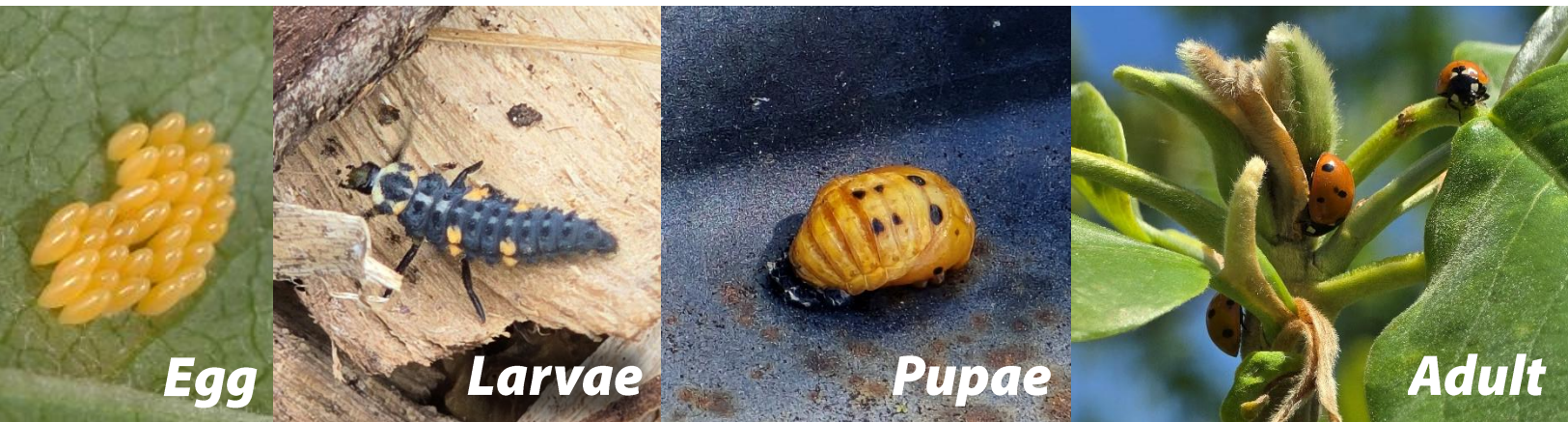


preferred food source, ladybugs are generalist predators and will consume other types of soft bodied insects, such as mealybugs, psyllids, whiteflies, and scale nymphs (crawlers).

“Populations will remain high as long as their food source is present” explains Cloyd. “If their food source declines, then ladybird beetle adults will move on.”

Ladybug numbers will decrease when populations of aphids or other soft bodied insect pests decline in numbers or become scarce, or if insecticides are applied that kill insect pests that ladybugs use as a food source.

When looking for ladybugs outside this spring, be aware ladybugs go through a life cycle known as complete metamorphosis, which includes four life stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Each stage looks distinctly different:



Eggs are tiny, yellow-orange and spindle-shaped. Eggs are often found on the undersides of leaves near food sources, with females laying eggs in groups of 5 to 30.

Larvae resemble “alligators” and are black with orange or yellow markings on the body. Larvae are flattened, with their ends tapering to a point and short bristles covering the body. They are approximately ¼ inch long and have three pairs of prominent front legs.

Pupae are round to dome shaped and found attached to leaves or other objects. Pupae are approximately ¼ inch long, and initially orange in color, developing black spots as adults near emergence.

Adults are round and dome shaped beetles. There are over 400 ladybugs native to North America, and seven are most common in Kansas. Each varies in color and the number of spots on the body. Many are red or yellow with black spots, however, some are black with red, yellow, or white spots.



- The most common ladybug is the convergent lady beetle, which is red orange with zero to six black spots on each wing cover.
- The sevenspotted lady beetle is red orange in color and together the wing covers bear seven black spots.
- The twicestabbed lady beetle is black with one red spot near the middle of each wing cover.

Development from egg to adult takes approximately six weeks. Adults live for up to two months with females laying approximately 200 to 300 eggs during their lifespan. There are several generations per year in Kansas with generations often overlapping.

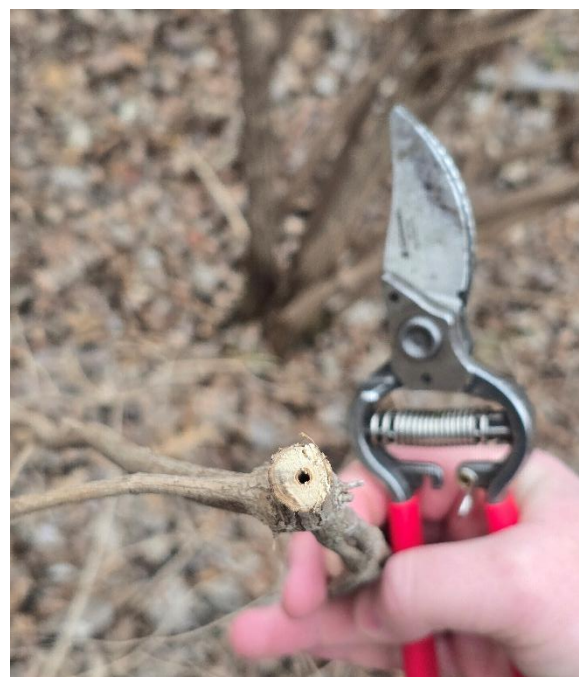


The multicolored Asian lady beetle, which is native to Asia, is another ladybug present in Kansas. Although the multicolored Asian lady beetle larvae and adults also feed on aphids, they are a nuisance insect pest when they invade homes, barns, and structures, by the thousands, during the winter months. Our native ladybug species and the multicolored Asian lady beetle look similar. However, the multicolored Asian lady beetle usually (not always) has 19 black spots on the body. Another, more reliable identification characteristic, is the multicolored Asian lady beetle has an “M” or “W” black shape on the thorax, which is the middle section of an insect, directly behind the head. This mark is centered above the line where the wing covers meet.

Identify & Control Invasive Plants As They Emerge:

Spring is an ideal time for Kansas landowners to identify and control aggressive species of woody plants, such as Asian Bush Honeysuckles and Callery Pear trees. Both species leaf out earlier than most native plants, making them easy to spot in early spring and giving them the competitive advantage over native species. Acting during this early growth period can slow their spread, reduce seed production, and help protect native species from encroachment.

Asian bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera spp.*) is a multi-stemmed shrub commonly found growing along tree rows, woodland edges, forest interiors, and floodplains throughout much of Kansas. These shrubs typically grow 6 to 15 feet tall and wide and are easily recognized in the spring as one of the first plants to leaf out. Leaves are oppositely arranged, with an ovate shape. Later in the spring, plants develop fragrant white to pink flowers which produce bright red berries in summer. Stems are hollow, and develop peeling, exfoliating bark with age.



Spring control of bush honeysuckle includes both mechanical and chemical options. Small plants can be easily pulled by hand or dug up with a shovel when soils are moist. Larger plants can be cut down to ground level, and treated with a cut stump treatment, such as products containing the active ingredients triclopyr or glyphosate. Cut-stump treatments need to be applied immediately after cutting to be highly effective. Foliar sprays can also be effective using the same active ingredients in early spring before native plant species leaf out. To assist with this, the Kansas Forest Service offers assistance through a backpack mist-blower loaner program.

Callery pear trees are also an aggressive species of concern. Often known by their formal cultivar names, such as ‘Bradford,’ ‘Cleveland Select,’ and ‘Aristocrat,’ Callery pears are a medium sized tree, 25-40 feet tall, and



15-30 feet wide. Although each of these cultivars were once self-sterile, cross-pollination among different varieties has resulted in fertile trees whose seeds are spread by birds. Most commonly found growing along roadsides, encroaching into grasslands, and in woodland areas, Callery pear trees are easily identified in spring by their white, malodorous flowers that appear before leaves emerge.

Spring is also an effective time to manage Callery pear. Seedlings can be pulled or dug up. Larger trees should be cut down at the base and immediately treated with a cut-

stump herbicide such as products containing the active ingredients triclopyr or glyphosate to prevent resprouting. [Visit the Callery Pear Identification and Control publication](#) from the Kansas Forest Service to learn more about identifying and controlling Callery Pear trees:

https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/invasive-callery-pear-identification-and-control_MF3570

Both plants have dense growth that can outcompete native plants for sunlight light, water, and nutrients. This not only reduces plant diversity but also degrades wildlife habitat. Early season control of both plants helps to prevent fruit production and future seed spread. By identifying and controlling bush honeysuckle and Callery pear this spring, landowners can take an important step toward protecting native plants and wildlife.

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For questions or additional information, contact: hortsupport@ksu.edu

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