Horticulture Newsletter

April 28, 2026

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Horticulture and Natural Resources

Video of the Week:

When purchasing plants for the garden this spring, there will likely be a wide range of choices, including different container sizes, quantities, and plant heights. Understanding how to choose high quality transplants is important to ensure both a successful garden and the best value for your money. This week's video provides tips for how to select the best transplants when doing your garden shopping this spring: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/selecting-the-best-transplant

Announcements:

May K-State Garden Hour:

Join us next week, on Wednesday, May 6, 2026, for the May K-State Garden Hour webinar on "Natives vs. Cultivars - Making Informed Choices for Your Landscape". The presentation will be live from Noon to 1pm. Discover what the current research reveals when selecting native plants versus cultivars of native plants for your landscape, and the differences each have on supporting pollinators and local ecosystems. Register to join us live, or view the recording afterwards online at: www.ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour

Support Master Gardener Plant Sales This Spring:

When plant shopping this spring, be sure to check out the various K-State Extension Master Gardener hosted plant sales going on around the state. Discover unique and locally adapted plants, all while supporting local volunteers who are committed to providing horticulture education and community beautification. See the full list of Master Gardener plant sale fundraisers online: https://extension.k-state.edu/master-gardener/explore-locally/sales.html

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Garden Calendar:

- Plant beans, corn, and vine crops in late April to early May
- Harvest asparagus until spear size decreases
- Do not remove foliage from spring flowering bulbs until it browns out naturally, as the current green leaves are needed to produce next year's flowers
- Add organic matter, such as compost, to garden beds before planting new flowers
- Plant new roses
- Prune spring flowering shrubs such forsythia and lilac after flowering
- Fertilize cool season lawns with slow-release nitrogen fertilizer
- Remove grass from base of young trees and shrubs to prevent lawn mower and line trimmer damage
- Begin summer fertilization of houseplants

Vegetables:

Planting Warm Season Vegetables Outside:

Early May is an ideal time to start many warm season vegetable crops outside in the garden. Warm season crops will grow best in hotter weather and warm soil conditions, often growing best in the summer heat. These vegetables must be planted after danger of frost has passed in the spring. Of course, each spring in Kansas is different, so all planting times may need to be adjusted earlier or later depending on the weather, varieties chosen, and your location in Kansas.

Here are some of the most common warm season crops that can be planted outside beginning in early May as seeds, transplants, or slips:

Crop	What To Plant	When To Plant	Potential Planting Window
Beans	Seed	Early May; Mid-July	Early May to early August
Cucumber	Seed or Transplant	Early May	Early May to mid-July
Eggplant	Transplant	Early to mid-May	Early May to mid-June
Melons	Seed or Transplant	Early to mid-May	Early May to early-July
Okra	Seed or Transplant	Mid-May	Mid-April to mid-May
Peppers	Transplant	Mid-May	Mid-May to mid-June
Pumpkins	Seed	Mid-May to mid-June	Early-May to early July
Squash (Summer)	Seed	Early May; Mid-July	Late-April to late July
Squash (Winter)	Seed	Mid-May to mid-June	Mid-May to early July
Sweet Corn	Seed	Late April to early May	Late April to mid June
Sweet Potatoes	Slips	Mid- to late May	Mid-May to late June
Tomatillos	Transplant	Early to mid-May	Early-May to mid-June
Tomatoes	Transplant	Early May	Mid-April to mid-June
Watermelon	Seed or Transplant	Early to mid-May	Early May to early July

For more information on how to plant and care for each crop, visit the Kansas Garden Guide (Chapter 15 has crop specific information): https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf

Fruit:

Fertilizing Grapes:

Grapes are a crop that do not require significant fertilization. In fact, overfertilization often causes more problems than skipping fertilizer applications.

When applying fertilizer, broadcast it in a band 1-1½ feet away from new plants. Gradually increase this distance each year, up to a maximum of 2-3 feet away from mature vines. Adjust the amount of fertilizer applied based on soil test results and the age of the plant:

- Year of Planting: Apply one-half cup of a 10-10-10 fertilizer per vine as growth begins in the spring. Repeat fertilization again one month later.
- Second Year: Apply one cup of a 10-10-10 fertilizer per vine as growth begins in the spring.
- Mature Vines (3 years and older): If the soil test recommends phosphorus and potassium, use a 10-10-10 fertilizer at the rate of two cups per mature vine as growth begins in the spring. If there are adequate levels of phosphorus and potassium in the soil, instead add 3/4 cup to one cup of a high nitrogen fertilizer such as a 27-3-3, 29-5-4, 30-3-3 or something similar instead of the 10-10-10. Though recommended for lawns, these fertilizers will also work well if they do not contain weed killers or crabgrass preventers.

As with all fertilizer applications, evaluate results and adjust future fertilizations accordingly. Fruiting canes on mature plants should be 4-6 feet long and slightly larger in diameter than a pencil. If vine growth is greater than this, reduce or skip future fertilizations.

Visit our Grapes publication for more growing tips: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/grapes_MF635.pdf

Flowers:

Why Ants Love Peonies (and Why You Do Not Need to Worry):

Gardening myths abound and one common myth is that peonies require ants to bloom. This myth is no surprise when you look at a peony bud this time of year – they are frequently covered in ants. Although the presence of ants on peonies may alarm gardeners at first, their abundance is perfectly normal and part of a mutually beneficial relationship.

Peony flower buds develop what are known as extrafloral nectaries on the outside of the buds. These specialized plant glands secrete nectar, which is high in sugar and therefore a good energy source for the ants. Ants feed on this nectar and emit a pheromone that alerts and invites other ants to the food source.

As ants congregate on the outside of the peony flower bud, they provide an important service to the plant, indirect protection. The ants work to protect this high value food source from other insects, and as a result, help to defend the blossoms from other floral-feeding insects which would damage the plant.

This is a symbiotic relationship that ultimately benefits both organisms. The ants feed on a high-quality food source produced on the outside of the bud, and never on the flower or plant itself. The peony receives flower-bud protection from pests. While the peony does not need the ants to bloom, it is to the plant's benefit that the ants are present.

If you notice ants on your peonies this spring, it is best to leave them alone. Once the peony flowers have finished blooming, the ants will naturally disappear and move on to other food sources in the landscape. Because ants on peonies are both temporary and beneficial, the use of insecticides is strongly discouraged.

If you would like to enjoy cut peony flowers indoors, simply hold the stems upside down outdoors and gently shake the ants off, or rinse them away with water before bringing the flowers inside.

Turf:

Controlling Yellow Nutsedge:

Yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*), is a common and highly competitive perennial weed found in Kansas lawns and landscapes. Its grass-like growth begins in late spring to early summer and grows until the first freeze. Although it resembles a grass, yellow nutsedge is not a true grass but rather a sedge. As a member of the sedge family, it can be distinguished from grasses by its triangular stem and three-ranked leaves. Yellow nutsedge also has leaves with a glossy, yellow-green color and a prominent midvein. During warm weather it is easily identified by its rapid growth, which stands out noticeably above lawns just a few days after mowing.

Yellow nutsedge spreads primarily through underground tubers, often called "nutlets," which allow the plant to survive winter and reemerge each year. A single plant can produce numerous tubers during the growing season, enabling infestations to expand quickly and be difficult to control.

Yellow nutsedge is most commonly found in low-lying or poorly drained areas of the landscape, and in areas with frequent irrigation. While this weed prefers full sun and moist soils, it can grow in well drained soils and in a wide range of soil types and light conditions.

Effective management of yellow nutsedge requires action early in the season to limit the production of new tubers midsummer. Begin by improving drainage in problem areas and avoiding frequent, light irrigation. In lawns, ensure cultural practices promote a healthy turfgrass that will compete with nutsedge.

In small or newly established areas, hand pulling may provide limited control if the entire root system and tubers are removed. However, this approach is impractical for larger or established infestations because broken shoots readily regrow. Removing the parent plant also activates nutlet growth, which will multiply the presence of nutsedge until underground tubers are depleted. Chemical control may be necessary in these situations.

Since yellow nutsedge is not a true grass, many traditional herbicides will not be effective. Ensure products are specifically labeled for sedges, and contain active ingredients such as sulfentrazone, halosulfuron, or imazosulfuron. In warm season lawns, products containing sulfosulfuron or flazasulfuron will also be effective. When using these products, avoid mowing about three days before and after treatment, and water the lawn well 24 hours before application to help with herbicide absorption. Because of the plant's waxy leaf surface and prolific nutlet production, multiple applications are often necessary. Early season applications (before mid-June) repeated across consecutive years will provide the best control.

Visit our Yellow Nutsedge fact sheet for more information: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Yellow%20Nutsedge.pdf

Trees & Shrubs:

Brownheaded Ash Sawfly:

Brownheaded Ash Sawfly larvae are active in Kansas. This pest primarily feeds on ash trees, however, larvae may be found on the ground this time of year too. Sawfly larvae are ½ to ¾ inch long, with a light green to yellow-green color. Broad white and green stripes extend the length of the body. In the middle of the whitish stripe there appears to be a darker green stripe, which is the larvae's digestive tract. Although sawfly larvae resemble caterpillars, they have only three pairs of true legs on their abdomen, followed by at least six pairs of "stublike" prolegs.

Wasp-like adults emerge in April to lay eggs. Upon hatching, larvae congregate in a massive group at the base of Ash trees. From there, larvae move up the trunk to feed on tree leaves throughout May and June. Feeding damage begins as shot-holes in the leaf and progresses into consumption of the entire leaf as larvae mature. By June, fully developed larvae migrate down to the soil at the base of the tree where they form a protective cocoon underground. They overwinter as mature larvae or prepupae and adults emerge the following spring.

Even though leaf damage can be severe, brownheaded ash sawfly damage occurs early enough in the growing season that trees are able to recover without detrimental effects to overall tree health. As a result, control is not necessary. If control is desired, however, a number of insecticides can be used, including products that contain active ingredients such as spinosad, horticultural oils, insecticidal soaps, cyfluthrin, malathion and esfenvalerate. Do not use products containing bacillus thuringiensis (BT), as these will have no effect on sawfly larvae.

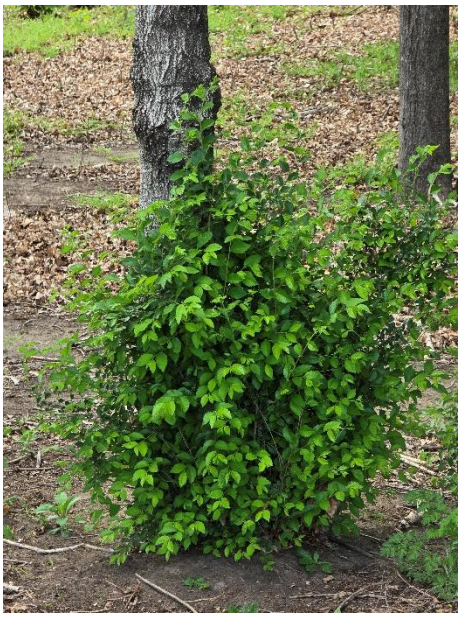
Visit our Brownheaded Ash Sawfly publication for more information:
https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/brownheaded-ash-sawfly_MF3297.pdf

Controlling Suckers On Trees:

Many trees, including fruit trees and shade trees, are prone to creating sucker growth at the base of the tree. Suckers are vigorous, upright shoots that develop from dormant buds on the roots of a tree or on the trunk below the graft. Suckers can develop several inches to several feet from the trunk. This type of growth should be removed as it appears, including throughout the spring and summer months.

The development of suckers may be an indication that the tree is under stress. More suckers are likely to be produced on trees under stress, particularly trees planted too deeply, injured by lawn mowers or string trimmers, affected by insects or disease, pruned too heavily, weakened by drought, nearing the end of their lifespan, or that are in decline. Some tree species, however, particularly trees that are grafted, are prone to sucker growth regardless of the health of the tree. Trees that commonly produce suckers include crabapple maple, linden, honeylocust, black locust, cottonwood, aspen, poplar, willow, dogwood, and most fruit trees.

There are many reasons sucker growth is generally undesirable. Suckers divert water, nutrients, and energy from the desired tree, reducing overall vigor and growth. In addition, suckers (especially those from grafted trees) often do not share the same characteristics as the desired tree. Suckers often have undesirable growth forms, making them susceptible to breaking. Sucker growth may serve as a harbor for disease and insect pests. Left uncontrolled, suckers can also be unsightly, turning a single stemmed tree into a shrub.



Remove suckers as soon as they appear. Use a sharp hand pruner to cut suckers back to their point of origin. This often requires a little bit of digging to find where suckers attach to the tree root. Many times, suckers are cut off at ground level, leaving several inches of sucker growth between the cut and where the sucker attaches to the root. This remaining stub will resprout multiple branches and create an even greater amount of sucker growth.

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Never apply herbicides (contact or systemic) to sucker growth. Using herbicides such as broadleaf herbicides or non-selective weed killers on suckers will damage and very possibly kill the original tree, since they share the same root system.

Sucker growth is most vigorous in spring but will likely regrow throughout the growing season. Remove suckers anytime they appear. Maintain overall tree health with proper maintenance and care. Try to identify sources of tree stress and correct issues that may encourage sucker growth.

Miscellaneous:

Ways To Support Backyard Pollinators:

Pollinators are critical to the survival of 80% of plants around the world. Bees, butterflies, moths, flies, birds, beetles, ants, wasps, and bats all help to pollinate these plants, including 75% of all the world's food crops. It is important we all take steps to support pollinators. Here are ways you can support local pollinator populations:

- **Use a wide variety of plants that bloom from early spring into late fall.** Creating a garden that has continuous flowers is both aesthetically pleasing and important for providing nectar for pollinators. Plant flowers in clumps, rather than single plants, to help pollinators find plants to feed on. Be sure to include plants native to your region.

- **Include larval host plants in the landscape**. To help attract butterflies, grow plants that butterfly caterpillars can feed on. Caterpillars will eat the plants, so place them where unsightly leaf damage can be tolerated. A butterfly guide will help determine the plants to include for specific butterfly species.

- **Provide a water source for pollinators.** A dripping hose on bare soil or containers filled with sand/small rocks and kept moist create ideal locations for butterflies and bees to land on and drink. Mix a small pinch of table salt or wood ashes into the damp sand or mud to provide additional salt & minerals that butterflies need.

- **Avoid modern hybrid flowers, especially those with "doubled" blossoms.** Often plant breeders have unwittingly left the pollen, nectar, and fragrance out of these blossoms while creating new varieties. Consider plants with simpler flower structures that are nectar-rich, and have surfaces for pollinators to land on.

- **Leave some dead branches and garden debris in the garden.** An occasional dead limb provides essential nesting sites for native bees, and an overwintering site for some pollinators. Many pollinators overwinter as larvae or cocoons in woodpiles, decaying branches, fallen leaves, and the dead stalks of perennials. Too much fall cleanup can diminish butterfly populations the following spring. Just make sure any dead branches are not a safety hazard. Occasional spots of bare soil are okay too, and provide space for ground nesting bees to dig tunnels for underground homes.

- **Eliminate pesticides whenever possible.** If using a pesticide is necessary, use the least toxic material possible. Read labels carefully before purchasing, as many pesticides are especially dangerous for bees. Use the product properly. Spray at night or in the early morning when bees and most other pollinators are not active.

- **Learn more about pollinators.** Information about pollinators can be found in a variety of publications, electronic resources, and books. The K-State Garden Hour webinar series has many webinars on pollinators:
  - Pollinator Plants for Continuous Food Sources (April 6, 2022)
  - Native Plants to Support Native Bees (June 16, 2021)
  - Making and Supporting Pollinators In The Garden (June 3, 2020)

Contributors:

Matthew McKernan, Consumer Horticulture Extension Associate

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

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