Horticulture Newsletter

April 7, 2026

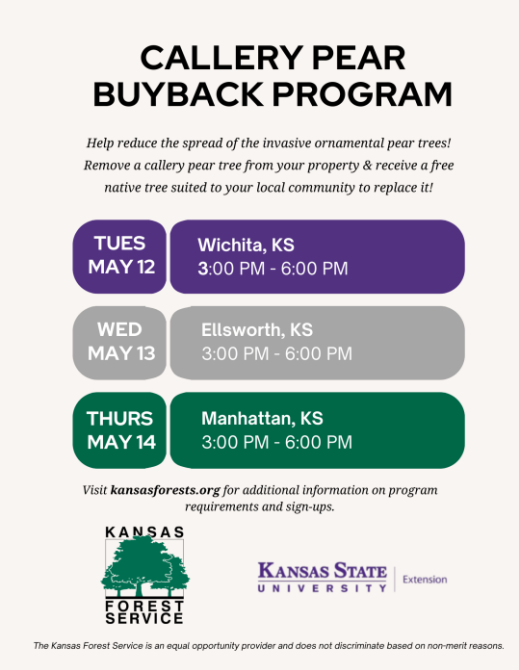
Kansas State University
Horticulture and Natural Resources

Video of the Week:

Improving your garden soil can improve the success of your garden. Building raised beds is one strategy for this. There are many common ways raised beds can be constructed, including the use of various products. This week's video highlights how to build a raised bed garden, including tips for designing and locating your raised bed: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/building-a-raised-bed-for-gardens

Announcements:

Kansas Forest Service's 2026 Callery Pear Tree Buyback Program:
To encourage landowners to help limit the spread of Callery Pear trees in Kansas, the Kansas Forest Service is hosting the 2026 Callery Pear Buyback Program. Remove a Callery Pear tree from your property and receive 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. Free trees are limited to one tree per household, and the replacement species will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis. 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



Garden Calendar:

- Plant carrots, turnips, beets, onion sets or transplants, and other salad crops in early April
- Plant new fruit trees
- Do not fertilize zoysia or bermudagrass lawns this early, nutrients go to weeds not dormant grass

Kansas State University | 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

- Spot treat broadleaf weeds such as dandelions, henbit, and chickweed
- Divide perennials
- Plant new trees and shrubs
- Leach excess fertilizers from houseplant containers by flushing water through soils

Vegetables:

Selecting Vegetable Crop Varieties:

When you look at a rack of vegetable garden seeds, or walk through the Garden Center aisles, the number of varieties to choose from can be overwhelming. While the choice can be difficult, the number of options is important. Different vegetable varieties are available to help gardeners choose the plant size, shape, growth habit, drought tolerance, disease resistance, and overall adaptation to local growing conditions. Varieties also allow the harvested crops to differ in color, texture, flavor, and maturity date, helping gardeners select the best option for their intended use.

While selecting vegetable crop varieties can be a personal preference, not all the varieties available will perform equally well in Kansas. To improve the success of your vegetable garden crop, look for varieties that have been proven to succeed in Kansas. Visit the *Recommended Vegetable Varieties* publication to find variety recommendations for over 35 of the most common vegetable crops: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/recommended-vegetable-varieties_L41

Consider this list a good jumping off point for the vegetable crop varieties you may want to try this year. Keep in mind that no list is perfect. The growing conditions of every summer vary in Kansas, favoring different varieties each year. New vegetable varieties are also introduced annually. For the best results in your garden, include at least one tried and tested variety from the publication above, and compare its performance with any other vegetable crop varieties you choose to grow this season.

Fruit:

Fertilizing Fruit Trees:

Fruit trees benefit from fertilization in the spring around the time new growth begins, usually around flowering. The amount of fertilizer needed varies with the age of the tree, and depending on local growing conditions. A soil test is always best when establishing a fertilization plan for your fruit trees, combined with an assessment of tree growth. While fertilizers will boost tree growth, they may also limit fruit production if trees are overfertilized. Overfertilization encourages too much branch and leaf growth, which directs less growth into flower buds for fruit production.

Normal Kansas soils lack nitrogen, so usually fruit tree fertilizer recommendations are for a high nitrogen fertilizer such as a 27-3-3, 30-3-3, 46-0-0 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. Use the following rates:

- Trees 1 to 2 years old, apply one-fourth cup of fertilizer per tree
- Trees 3 to 4 years old, apply one-half cup per tree
- Trees 5 to 10 years old, apply 1 to 2 cups per tree
- Trees more than 10 years old, apply 2 to 3 cups

Spread all fertilizer evenly on the ground under the canopy of the tree, from the trunk of the tree out to the ends of the branches. Water in the fertilizer after application.

Evaluate tree growth each year before fertilizing. On apple trees, last year's growth should be 6 to 12 inches long, cherries should have 10 to 12 inches of new growth, and peaches should have 10 to 18 inches of terminal growth. If growth is less than this, apply a higher rate of fertilizer, and if more growth is present, decrease fertilizer rate.

Reduce fertilizer rates if trees are growing in lawns that are regularly fertilized. In years when flowers are damaged by frost and no fruit sets, avoid fertilizing to prevent too much vegetative growth.

Flowers:

Caring For Easter Lilies In Kansas:

Easter lilies are a traditional holiday plant this time of year. While they are best enjoyed as a houseplant, Easter lilies can be planted in the landscape with moderate success. As a landscape plant, Easter lilies will look much different in the garden – reaching up to three feet tall and not blooming until later in the summer months. Their winter hardiness will vary greatly depending on the cultivar. If transplanting Easter lilies into the landscape is something you want to try, follow these tips.

After the flowers have faded, remove the flower stalk so that the plant's energy does not go toward making seed. Do not cut off the entire stem or plant leaves. Keep the plant inside until the danger of frost has passed. Water regularly, but do not allow the soil to become waterlogged or for water to sit in the tray.

Once frost is no longer a concern, move plants outdoors. Gradually acclimate lilies to outdoor growing conditions over one to two weeks before planting in their permanent garden location.

When planting, select a sunny, well-drained location. Good drainage is vital for lilies. Incorporate organic matter, such as compost, into the soil during planting to improve drainage and water holding capacity. Plant the bulbs 6 inches deep and 12 to 18 inches apart. Spread the roots out in the hole during planting. Cover with soil and water well.

Provide good moisture year-round. Apply three inches of mulch around plants to conserve moisture and help keep roots cool. Plants may need to be staked to support their height, especially in windy locations or under too much shade.

Plants may continue to grow for the remainder of the summer, but often after transplanting the top growth dies off before fall. New growth may appear later in the summer, or the plant may stay dormant until the following spring. Either is acceptable.

Covering plants with additional mulch in the fall and over the winter months may help increase winter hardiness. In the spring, uncover plants to allow new growth to appear. Fertilize from when growth appears until blooms begin.

If lilies are something you hope to add to your garden, consider planting Asiatic lilies (*Lilium asiatica*) over Easter lilies. Asiatic lilies will be easier to grow, and a more consistent performer in the Kansas landscape. Oriental lilies may also be a better option than Easter lilies. Oriental lilies usually have larger, more fragrant flowers than Asiatic lilies, but also require more care.

Staking & Caging Peony Plants:

Peonies are a common garden plant for Kansas. They produce large, colorful flowers with minimal maintenance, and can survive for years. In fact, peonies can be commonly found around old farmsteads, abandon houses, and in cemeteries where the plants receive little to no care at all.

While peonies can survive with minimal care in the landscape, we can improve the aesthetics of peony plants by placing cages or stakes around the plant this time of year. Often when peonies begin to bloom from late April to late May, the weight of their flowers, strong winds, and heavy rains can cause flower stems to fall over and lay on the ground. Installing cages around the plant can be an easy solution for this problem.

Circular, metal ring cages with two to four legs are the most common caging tool used for supporting peonies. Circular cages may be an open ring or have a grid pattern across the opening for additional support. Homemade support cages can also be created using 3-5 stakes placed around the perimeter of the plant, and weaving twine or heavy string between and around the stakes to create a grid pattern over the center of the plant.

Peony cages should be placed 15-18 inches above the ground, or at about two-thirds the mature height of the plant. At this height, the plant will grow through the cage, and the support structure will disappear in the thick plant foliage.

In the spring, peony growth emerges rapidly from the crown of the plant. It is best to install cages or other support in early spring, just as the foliage emerges, to allow the plant to grow up through the cage. Ideally, peony cages should be installed before plant growth

reaches 12 inches in height. If plant growth passes the ideal window for installing staking or caging, carefully guide individual plant stems through the circular ring, grid or plant cage when installing supports.

Visit the Peony Garden Center Guide publication to learn more about growing peonies in Kansas: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/publications/publications/turf-ornamentals/flower-publications/Peonies.pdf

Turf:

Setting Spring Lawn Mowing Height:

As people fire up the lawn mower for spring, many people consider lowering their mowing height. While this can benefit the lawn, it can also create problems. For the first one or two mowings of the season, a slightly lower mower height can speed spring green-up by removing old, dead grass and allowing the soil to warm up more quickly. Regularly cutting the lawn too short, however, can stress the turfgrass, weaken root systems, and encourage weed growth. Understanding when and how much to lower your mowing height is key to setting your lawn up for a healthy growing season.

When mowing tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass for the first time this spring, mow as low as 2 inches. Be careful not to mow too low and scalp the turfgrass. For warm season lawns, such as Buffalograss, Bermudagrass, or Zoysiagrass, wait until late-April or May before mowing this short.

Remember to raise the mowing height after the first mowing. Tall fescue should be mowed at a height of 3 to 4 inches, and Kentucky bluegrass should be mowed at 2.5 to 3.5 inches tall. For cool season lawns, root depth and mowing height are related. The higher the mowing height, the deeper the root system. Taller mowing heights also shade out weeds and create more competition against weed growth. The recommended mowing heights for different types of turfgrass are listed in the chart below.

Type of Turfgrass	Recommended Range Of Mowing Heights
Tall Fescue	2½ – 4 inches
Kentucky Bluegrass	2½ – 3½ inches
Perennial Ryegrass	2 – 3½ inches
Bermudagrass	1 – 2½ inches
Zoysiagrass	1 – 2½ inches
Buffalograss	3 – 4+ inches

Always use the upper end of mowing height range for optimal turfgrass health, less weeds, and deeper roots.

During the growing season avoid removing more than one-third of the total height of the lawn at a time. For example, if you want to keep your lawn at 2 inches, then you would mow when the grass reaches 3 inches tall. To keep a cool season lawn height of 3 inches, then mow the turf when it is around 4.5 inches tall. Cool season lawns will grow more in spring than summer, so mowing frequencies may need to increase in the spring and decrease in the summer to maintain this rule. Keep in mind, the shorter you want to keep your lawn, the more often you will have to mow it.

Trees & Shrubs:

Crabapple Trees For Kansas:

The beautiful blossoms of the flowering crabapple are one of the many signals that announce the beginning of spring. Crabapple trees, however, are a tree for all four seasons in the Kansas landscape. In the spring crabapple trees can have white, pink, or red flowers. Often the outside color of the flower bud can vary from the inside color of the flower, creating additional contrast. During the growing season, many crabapple cultivars have colored foliage, ranging from red, purple, bronze to green leaf colors. Showy fruit develops in the summer and fall months, often persisting into winter for additional winter interest. There are even fruitless varieties for people looking to avoid the mess. Trees often have nice fall color too, again varying by cultivar. In addition to having year-round interest, crabapple cultivars also come in a variety of forms and sizes, making this tree a great fit for any landscape. It is no surprise then that crabapple trees are a popular landscape plant across Kansas.

If crabapple trees have a weakness, it is that they can be prone to many diseases including apple scab, fireblight, cedar apple rust and powdery mildew. The good news is that plant breeders have developed many cultivars with disease resistance, to the point that many of these diseases have been almost eliminated in some cultivars. The challenge becomes picking the right cultivar to fit your landscape.

K-State has researched crabapple disease tolerance for many years at the John C. Pair Horticultural Research Center, located South of Wichita, Kansas. A few photos of this Crabapple research area are shown on the left and on the following page.

With this research, the Flowering Crabapple publication was created to help homeowners learn more about selecting the right crabapple tree, and what varieties to look for with the best disease resistance. You can find this resource on the K-State website at: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/flowering-crabapples_MF875.pdf

As new crabapple tree cultivars are introduced to the market, this research continues. In fact, ten new crabapple tree varieties were planted in the crabapple research block in March of 2026. These new cultivars will be evaluated for their disease tolerance and performance in Kansas, and results will be shared in future articles and updated publications. If you are interested in which cultivars have been planted this spring, here is the list:

1. Coralburst Crabapple (*Malus* 'Coralcole')
2. Donald Wyman Crabapple (*Malus* 'Donald Wyman')
3. Ivory Spear Crabapple (*Malus* 'JFS KW214MX')
4. Louisa Crabapple (*Malus* 'Louisa')
5. Marilee Crabapple (*Malus* 'Jarmin')
6. Raspberry Spear Crabapple (*Malus* 'JFS KW213MX')
7. Royal Raindrops Crabapple (*Malus* 'JFS-KW5')
8. Sargent Tina Crabapple (*Malus sargentii* 'Tina')
9. Snow Crystal Crabapple (*Malus* 'JFS KW218MX')
10. Starlite Flowering Crabapple (*Malus* x 'Jeflite')

Miscellaneous:

Determining When To Plant Based On The Last Freezes And Frosts Of Spring:

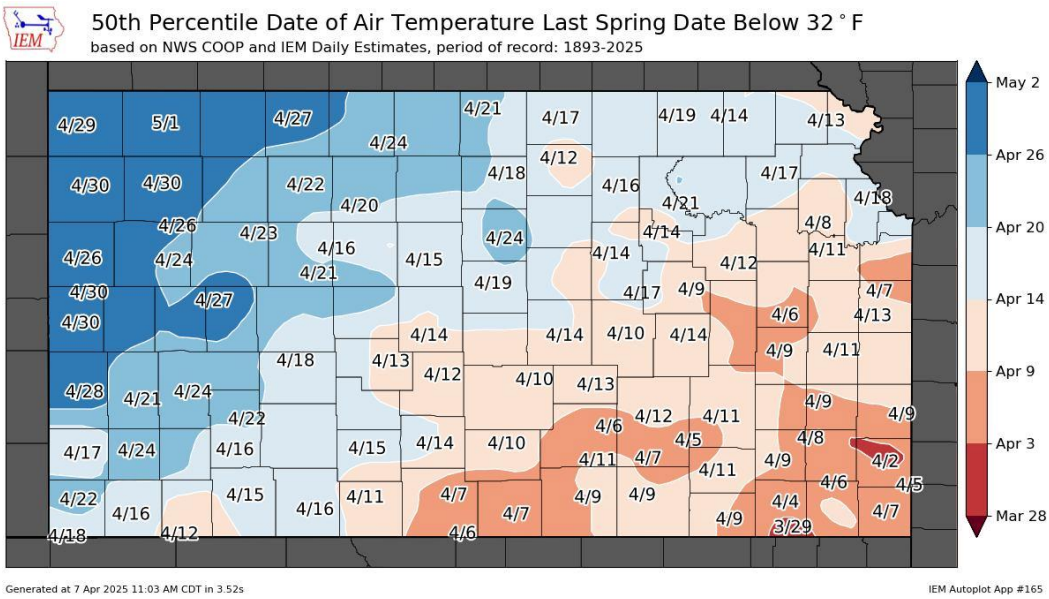
Springtime temperatures in Kansas always fluctuate wildly, and this spring has been no exception. While warmer temperatures are forecasted across Kansas, keep in mind that it may still be too early to plant many garden plants. The threats of freezes and frosts still loom for springtime in Kansas. Both freezes and frosts create the same damage to plants, but each occurs under different conditions.

Freezes are the easiest to predict, they occur when air temperatures are 32°F or colder. Freeze damage is often more widespread, but it can be more easily predicted by historical weather data. The National Weather Service's Cooperative Observer Program (NWS COOP) has created the map below, that shows the date of the average last freeze (32°F) in Kansas. Most of these dates center around mid-April.

The average typical date range for the last spring freeze of 32°F or lower is also listed below for several cities across Kansas:

- Chanute = April 5-14
- Goodland = May 1-10
- Olathe = April 10-20
- Russell = April 16-27
- Salina = April 13-24
- Wichita = April 5-14

Keep in mind that both the map and the date ranges only showcase the average date of



KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | 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

our last freeze. In any given year, the last freeze could be before or after that average date. In fact, in Kansas, the historical last freeze dates have ranged from early March all the way into late May for the entire state.

Frosts, on the other hand, can occur when air temperatures are warmer than 32°F, but the surfaces of plant tissues drop to 32°F or below. This occurs as plants and surrounding surfaces radiate heat (or release heat) to the atmosphere during the nighttime hours. As heat is lost, surface temperatures can drop and fall below freezing, allowing for ice to form on plant surfaces. Nights with clear skies, little to no winds, cool temperatures, and some air moisture favor frost formation.

Studies by the National Weather Service show that at temperatures 32°F and below, widespread frost/freeze will occur. When conditions are right, areas of frost can develop at temperatures between 33°F to 37°F, however patchy frost can even develop at temperatures between 38°F to 42°F.

Although the threats of freezes and frosts are diminishing across Kansas, anyone planning to transplant plants out into their garden will need to monitor nighttime weather conditions for the next several weeks. Remember there have been many years in the past when freezing temperatures occur well into late April and even May.

Contributors:

Matthew McKernan, Consumer Horticulture Extension Associate

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

To have the KSU Horticulture Newsletter emailed to you, subscribe by sending an e-mail message to hortsupport@ksu.edu listing your e-mail address in the message.

The KSU Horticulture Newsletter is also available online at:
http://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/newsletters/