



# Horticulture Newsletter

**March 31, 2026**

**KANSAS STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and  
Natural Resources



## Video of the Week:

Asparagus is one of the first crops that can be harvested each spring. Plants can live for 15 years or more in the garden, so good plant care is important. [This week's video highlights how to grow and harvest asparagus in Kansas:](#)  
<https://kansashealthyards.org/all-videos/video/growing-asparagus>

## Announcements:

### **April K-State Garden Hour:**

Learn how to capitalize on April showers to bring beautiful flowers the rest of the growing season by managing rainwater with rain gardens, bioswales, rain barrels and more during this month's K-State Garden Hour. Join us from Noon to 1:00pm this Wednesday, April 1, 2026 for the free webinar, "April Showers, Rain Garden Flowers". Register now to join us live, or watch the recording afterwards online at: <http://ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour>

#KSTATEGARDENHOUR

## K-STATE GARDEN HOUR

### April Showers, Rain Garden Flowers

Wednesday, April 1st 12:00PM -1:00PM CST

The month of April brings spring showers to Kansas, however water availability becomes scarce as the season progresses, making water management especially important. Join Markis Hill, Johnson County Horticulture Agent, to discover how to best utilize rain when it arrives, while also saving some for when the rain disappears. Learn about rain gardens, bioswales, rain barrels and more to help conserve water this growing season.

Register here!

Please register for this free Zoom Webinar at:  
[ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour](http://ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour)

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### **Celebrate America's 250:**

The State Library of Kansas is celebrating the United States' 250th anniversary by highlighting nature and the Kansas outdoors in the month of April. In addition to showcasing a list of great book recommendations, you can join them online for a free presentation on "Gardening in Kansas with K-State Extension Resources" on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Learn about resources you can use to help your garden grow: <https://library.ks.gov/KS250/April>

## Garden Calendar:

- Finish pruning fruit trees, grapes, raspberries, and blackberries.
- Deadhead seed pods from spent bulbs, such as daffodil, tulip, or crocus.
- Start seeds inside for tomatoes, peppers, and other warm season vegetables.
- Plant new trees in the landscape, especially evergreens.
- Sharpen and repair garden tools in preparation for the gardening season.

## Vegetables:

### **Hardening Off And Preparing Transplants For The Garden:**

Growing conditions are very different outdoors versus inside the greenhouse or indoors under a grow light. Plants moving from one location to another need time to adjust to the changes in colder temperatures, stronger winds, greater light intensity, and differences in moisture. Without adequate time to adjust, these extreme changes in environment may stunt plant growth or kill plants entirely. This is why the process of “hardening off”, or the practice of gradually moving plants from their protected environment to their harsher, permanent location in the garden, is important.



Two weeks before plants are intended to be transplanted outdoors, begin the hardening off process by decreasing the amount of water seedlings are given. Reduce the frequency of watering, but do not allow transplants to wilt. Avoid fertilizing plants before or during the hardening off period.

Place plants outside in a shaded location for 2-3 hours during the warmest part of the day (usually between 12-5 PM, ideally on an overcast day if possible). Shelter plants from strong, damaging winds, heavy rains, or extreme temperatures during this time. At the end of the designated time period each day, move plants back indoors.

Each day, gradually increase the plant's time outside and their exposure to sunlight and wind by a few additional hours. After several days of leaving plants outdoors for 10 to 12 hours, begin leaving plants outside for 24 hours. After a couple of days of being left outside all day, plants should be ready for transplanting.

When hardened off successfully, plants will develop thickened cell walls and tougher, more durable tissue. During this time the leaf surfaces will build thicker layers of wax to reduce water loss in the plant. Plants will strengthen cell walls with additional lignin to build resistance to wind damage. Plants also reduce the amount of freeze-prone water within plant cells.

Keep in mind that not all plants will harden off to the same level of toughness. Cool season plants that have been hardened off will likely tolerate temperatures in the 40's. Warm season plants, however, even after being hardened off, will require warm nighttime temperatures above 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

## Fruit:

### **Determining Spray Schedules For Fruit Trees:**

Producing fruit that is not heavily damaged by pests takes planning. It begins with selecting disease resistant plants, proper site selection, and maintaining a healthy orchard with watering, pruning, cleanup, and integrated pest management practices. Even then insecticide and fungicide sprays may be necessary.

It can be a challenge to know what insect or diseases will be most problematic each year, as weather and growing conditions can vary from year to year, favoring different pest problems. This makes knowing whether or not to spray fruit trees for pest control even more difficult.

When determining whether or not to spray fruit trees, first decide will the trees have fruit or not. Many fruit trees are very susceptible to late frosts, especially peaches, nectarines and apricots that may bloom early in the season. Check to make sure the fruit buds were not killed by late frosts or freezes. Just touching dead buds at this time of year will cause them to fall off. If flowers were damaged by cold and the tree will not produce any fruit this year, do not apply products recommended by a spray schedule.



If flowers are undamaged by cold, consider what pests have been most problematic in the past, and what stage of development the tree is in. Each pest requires specific timing for insecticide and fungicide sprays to be effective.

For homeowners growing peaches, nectarines, plums, and cherries, the [Spray Guide for Growing Stone Fruit at Home](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/spray-guide-for-growing-stone-fruit-at-home_MF3430.pdf) publication will cover the most common pests associated with these trees. Be sure to pay special attention to the growth stage recommended with each product: [https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/spray-guide-for-growing-stone-fruit-at-home\\_MF3430.pdf](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/spray-guide-for-growing-stone-fruit-at-home_MF3430.pdf)

For homeowners growing apples, a spray schedule may be more important as apples have more common pest problems in Kansas. The [Spray Guide for Growing Apples at Home](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/spray-guide-for-growing-apples-at-home_MF3429.pdf) publication will cover the most common pests associated with apple trees. Start by determining the disease susceptibility of your specific apple tree cultivar, in order to select the most appropriate spray schedule: [https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/spray-guide-for-growing-apples-at-home\\_MF3429.pdf](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/spray-guide-for-growing-apples-at-home_MF3429.pdf)

Pears are often able to be grown in Kansas without the need of a spray schedule. If issues arise, recommendations will be similar to those given for apples. To see more information related to products that can be used on fruit tree pests, as well as the number of days required between the last application and when the fruit can be harvested, visit the [Fruit Pesticides, Active Ingredients, and Labeled Fruits](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/fruit-pesticides-active-ingredients-and-labeled-fruits_MF3431.pdf) publication: [https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/fruit-pesticides-active-ingredients-and-labeled-fruits\\_MF3431.pdf](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/fruit-pesticides-active-ingredients-and-labeled-fruits_MF3431.pdf)

## Turf:

### **Controlling Grassy Sandbur:**

One of the weeds many homeowners and public parks struggle with during the summer months is grassy sandbur. Sometimes called “sticker” plants, grassy sandbur produce round seed heads with sharp spines throughout the summer months. Most often sandburs are a problem in lawns with thin turfgrass, but the plant is well adapted to dry, sandy soils.



While a thick, healthy lawn is always the best defense against weeds, pre-emergence herbicides can be a helpful tool in preventing sandbur before they establish. To control sandbur with pre-emergence herbicides, follow the same recommendations used for crabgrass prevention. Not all pre-emergence herbicides will be effective against grassy sandbur, so always read the label. Products that contain any of the following three active ingredients should help considerably in preventing grassy sandbur: oryzalin, pendimethalin or prodiamine.

None of these pre-emergence herbicides may provide perfect control, but each should help reduce the amount of grassy sandbur present when applied correctly. Be sure to check the label if repeat applications are needed.

[For more information on Grassy Sandbur management, visit our fact sheet: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Grassy%20Sandbur%20-%20Stickers.pdf](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Grassy%20Sandbur%20-%20Stickers.pdf)

### **Blooming Redbud Trees Signal It Is Time To Apply Summer Weed Preventers:**

Across Kansas, many of the Eastern Redbud trees are in bloom. This event is one of the reminders that conditions are right to put down pre-emergence herbicides to prevent weeds in our lawns and landscape beds this summer.

There are many annual weeds that pre-emergence herbicides can help block over the summer months, including: crabgrass, goosegrass, foxtail, sandbur, barnyardgrass, spurge, purslane, oxalis, puncturevine, annual pigweed, and morning glory. See our [last Horticulture Newsletter](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/horticulture-newsletter/documents/2026/march2026/Horticulture_Newsletter_March-17-2026.pdf) for more information on timing and what products to apply for weed prevention: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/horticulture-newsletter/documents/2026/march2026/Horticulture\\_Newsletter\\_March-17-2026.pdf](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/horticulture-newsletter/documents/2026/march2026/Horticulture_Newsletter_March-17-2026.pdf)

Keep in mind that some redbud trees may have had their flowers damaged during periods of extreme cold in mid-March. As a result, some redbud trees may not have as noticeable of flowers this year to remind you to apply springtime weed preventers.



## Trees & Shrubs:

### **Remove Pine Trees Infected With Pine Wilt:**



Although pine trees are not native to Kansas, they are planted widely across the state. Of the challenges that pines face in Kansas, Pine Wilt disease is one of the most challenging. Pine Wilt is caused by microscopic worms called nematodes, and when introduced into a pine tree, they multiply rapidly and block the water-conducting tissue, causing the tree to collapse within a few weeks to a few months. Most trees infected with Pine Wilt will die from August to December.

The evidence of Pine Wilt is clear this time of year. The entire tree will be dead, and the brown, dead needles remain attached to the tree (usually for up to 1 year after infection). Branches will also be dry, brittle, and lightweight due to the reduced resin within the tree. It is these trees that need to be identified and removed from the landscape immediately.

For Pine Wilt to spread from tree to tree, nematodes are carried by a long-horned borer called the pine sawyer beetle. These beetles overwinter in dead wood and begin emerging around May 1 in Kansas, carrying nematodes to new trees, and continuing the cycle of infection. It is important to act now to remove dead pine trees. Infected pine trees should be cut down as soon as possible. Although May 1 is the latest date to remove infected trees, April 1 is the preferred deadline to help prevent beetles from emerging.

When removing trees, cut the tree down to the ground level. Do not leave a stump. Chip or burn the wood immediately to destroy the beetles and nematodes within the wood. Do not save the wood for firewood.

For more strategies on managing Pine Wilt and other pine tree issues, visit our [Pine Diseases In Kansas](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/pine-diseases-in-kansas-tip-blight-dothistroma-needle-blight-and-pine-wilt_L722.pdf) publication: [https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/pine-diseases-in-kansas-tip-blight-dothistroma-needle-blight-and-pine-wilt\\_L722.pdf](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/pine-diseases-in-kansas-tip-blight-dothistroma-needle-blight-and-pine-wilt_L722.pdf)

## Flowers:

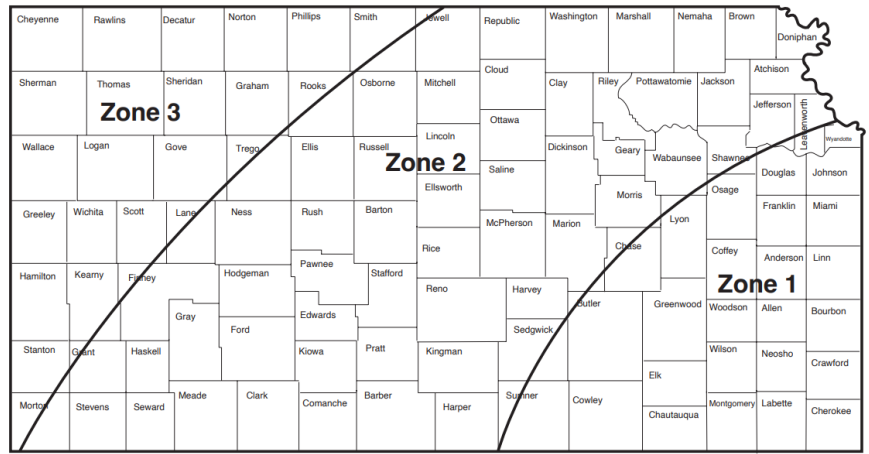
### **Establish Wildflower and Native Grass Areas Early In The Season:**

Planting areas of wildflowers and native grasses is growing in popularity. When compared to lawns, areas of native grasses and wildflowers offer greater diversity of plant life and more habitat for bees, birds, and butterflies.

While many people look to establish wildflower and native grass areas later in the year, the best time for planting is before long periods of wet conditions. In Kansas, this puts the ideal planting date around April 1<sup>st</sup>, before spring rains begin. During this time, research has shown that plantings have the greatest chance of success and are more likely to survive their first winter. Anytime between March to early May should be

acceptable for planting, depending on your location in the state. The map on the right shows the optimum and acceptable seeding dates for planting native grasses.

Select plants that are native to the local area. Try to limit seed sources from within 250 to 400 miles south or 100 to 150 miles north of the intended planting location. If this is not possible, select named varieties or cultivars known to perform well in your area. These varieties will be more closely adapted to the local environment, and have a greater likelihood of success.



Zone	Optimum	Acceptable
1	March 25–April 10	Feb. 15–May 1
2	April 1–April 20	March 1–May 15
3	April 10–April 30	March 1–May 15

Purchase seed with high germination percent and high purity. Not all seeds in the bag will germinate and grow, so be sure to spend money on seeds with the highest likelihood of growth. Be sure to also check the date on the seed label. Purchase seed that is 2 years old or newer for the highest germination percentage. After 2 years germination declines with seed age.

Take the time needed to prepare the area for planting. The area should be free of competitive weeds and other broadleaf plants. If the area was tilled, firm up soil and ensure new weed seedlings do not emerge. Avoid urges to apply fertilizers at the time of planting. Weeds will likely benefit more from fertilizers than native species.

For more guidance on establishing wildflower and native grass areas, visit our publication [Establishing and Managing Native Prairie Plants in Small Areas](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/establishing-and-managing-native-prairie-plants-in-small-areas_MF3233.pdf): [https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/establishing-and-managing-native-prairie-plants-in-small-areas\\_MF3233.pdf](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/establishing-and-managing-native-prairie-plants-in-small-areas_MF3233.pdf)

## Miscellaneous:

### **Identifying Frost & Freeze Injury To Spring Plants:**

Kansas temperatures have ranged wildly this month, from lows across the state in the single digits and teens on March 16<sup>th</sup>, to highs in the mid-90’s just four days later, on March 21<sup>st</sup>. Many locations even neared 100 degrees, with Plainville, Kansas setting the new record for the warmest March temperature ever observed in Kansas at 101 degrees Fahrenheit. Just 5 days later, however, on March 26<sup>th</sup>, Ashland and Hugoton set an even warmer record for March with a daytime high of 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

While each of these temperature extremes poses its own challenge, the extreme back and forth has likely caused freeze injury to plants in your area. Unseasonably warm winter temperatures have encouraged many plants to emerge from dormancy earlier than normal this year. These warmer temperatures reduce the cold tolerance of plants as spring growth begins, increasing the severity of frost and freeze damage. Once spring begins, most plants will receive noticeable frost or freeze injury when temperatures dip below mid-20’s.

Frost and freeze damage can present itself differently in various types of landscape plants. Symptoms of injury include:

- Plant tissues that first appear dark green and water-soaked, later browning and becoming mushy
- Leaves curl and droop, eventually, dropping from the plant
- Leaves that scorch and turn brown from the tips and edges
- Plant tissues that shrivel, brown, or blacken
- Leaf or flower buds that do not open, becoming dry and brittle
- Flower buds that die immediately upon opening
- Branches and stems that darken in color from the tips
- Turfgrass that browns, or develops irregular, blotchy, tan patterns, similar to stripes or camouflage



Perennial plants that had started to grow may have been killed to the ground. Other plants may die back partially, with new growth that will emerge from buds and stems lower on the plant. Evergreen and semi-evergreen plants may hold onto bronzed or brown foliage until new growth causes damaged foliage to drop.

When evaluating the damage of cold temperatures to trees and shrubs, 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 dead. If the plant tissue directly underneath the bark is green, the branch is alive. Wait for the plant to re-leaf out before pruning.

The extent of cold injury will depend on many factors, including the type of plant, stage of development, temperature, and exposure. Various parts of the plant also have different levels of cold sensitivity, with flowers and flower buds being more sensitive to cold than leaves or leaf buds. New growth is most sensitive to freeze damage.

### **Helping Plants Recover From Cold Injury:**

With most cold damaged plants, be patient and use the wait-and-see approach to evaluate how plants recover before taking action. It usually takes a few weeks to see damage from cold temperatures to become fully visible. Give plants time to recover before assessing the damage. Some plants may die, however most plants should recover. Just keep in mind damaged plants may take longer for new growth to emerge this spring.

For all plants suffering from freeze or frost injury:

1. Wait and allow adequate time for plants to recover before conducting heavy pruning or removal. Most plants will recover, but they may take more time than usual to leaf back out.
2. Provide a deep watering to reduce drought stress on the plant. Make sure to provide moisture 6-12 inches deep to support plant roots. Often this is accomplished by spring rainfall, but supplemental water may be needed in periods of drought or light rain.
3. Wait to fertilize until the normal time of year for each plant. Too much fertilization early in the season may only push plants to produce new growth which will be very susceptible to additional frosts and freezes.
4. Leave leaf debris in flowerbeds, including mushy leaves damaged in recent freezing weather. These leaves and recently damaged plant tissue will provide some insulation for perennial plants that may still experience upcoming spring frosts and freezes. If a lack of cover exists in your flowerbed, use mulch to insulate plants.
5. Provide regular care throughout the growing season to help plants replenish the energy used to produce secondary flushes of growth.

For spring flowering bulbs, such as daffodil or tulip, do not cut back the foliage until it turns completely brown. Allow any undamaged portions of the leaves to photosynthesize and produce flowers the following spring.

For most healthy, well-established trees and shrubs, they will leaf out again if the initial flush growth is damaged or killed by cold. Additional growth will usually return within a few weeks.

Proper care should be taken during the remainder of the growing season to help trees, shrubs and perennials avoid further stress, and help plants recover the energy they expend producing secondary flushes of growth.

Given time, most plants will grow out of cold damage, and it will be easier to gauge if and where pruning is needed. Once the new growth appears, prune off any obviously dead sections of the plant.

### **Contributors:**

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